



Edmonton Social Planning Council

Safeguarding Alberta's interests and power

INFO SHEET August 2004

The Alberta government has just released the report and recommendations of the **MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation**. The committee's objective was to get input from Albertans about federal vs. provincial jurisdiction and authority. The recent federal election saw ESPC ask about the federal government's role in developing, funding and enforcing social policy and programs (see ESPC Election Bulletin June 2004). The MLA Committee is recommending overwhelmingly that such control and authority reside exclusively in the hands of the provinces. Their perspective is a significant shift away from our historically held belief in a Canada where the federal government has a strong role to play in ensuring the equitable and stable delivery of public services across the country. What follows are some highlights from their report that have been largely ignored or underplayed to this point. The entire document is available on the government of Alberta website: www.gov.ab.ca.

WHAT THEY SAID

The provinces can create a better Canada by: reshaping the institutions that protect regional interests ... and, safeguarding provincial constitutional authority.

- Report of the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation

The overarching imperative heard by the Committee was that Alberta commit itself to safeguarding its constitutional rights and responsibilities.

Maintaining jurisdiction over these responsibilities ensures Albertans' demands and priorities are addressed in ways that work to the benefit of the province and are carried out by an order of government easily kept accountable by voters.

- Report of the MLA Committee on Strengthening Alberta's Role in Confederation

The Committee's guiding principles

- The Alberta government should manage its existing constitutional responsibilities (including health care, education and most social programs) effectively, and firmly defend its right to do so ... Maintaining our rightful jurisdiction over our responsibilities ensures appropriate stewardship by Alberta.
- Alberta should work with other provinces, where appropriate, to identify common interests in both federal-provincial and inter-provincial relationships ... The Committee sees provincial flexibility as a key principle in the Canadian federation.

Among the key recommendations

- the Alberta government urge the federal government to **end Canada Health Transfer, Canada Social Transfer and Health Reform Transfer payments** in favour of transferring corresponding tax room to the provinces in order to allow provinces to appropriately fund programs within their constitutional responsibility ... In the past, there has been skepticism about the federal government's willingness to replace transfer payments with a transfer of tax room, since it would eliminate the federal government's ability to control the way provinces manage their constitutional areas of responsibility. But ... the Committee believes the time is right to raise this issue on the national agenda.
- the Alberta government **work with municipalities to find solutions to issues surrounding municipal funding** and fiscal flexibility ... The federal government has outlined a number of new proposals related to municipalities over the past year ... Alberta must ensure the federal government respects the policies and spending priorities of the provinces and their municipal government partners.
- the Alberta government reach a **new Tax Collection Agreement with the federal government that addresses Alberta's concerns** and provides increased tax policy flexibility.

