

Hon. Rachel Notley  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
5th Floor  
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Edmonton, AB T5K 1E7

April 26, 2023

Open Letter sent via email: [rachel.notley@albertandp.ca](mailto:rachel.notley@albertandp.ca)

Dear Ms. Notley,

We are reaching out to you on behalf of several Alberta construction associations, who would like clarification on two policy changes that you promise, should you be elected in the upcoming Alberta general election. We are concerned that if implemented, these changes could increase taxpayer costs and limit the access of thousands of Alberta companies and construction workers to public and private projects, during a critical time when demand for their skills is at an all-time high.

### **Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)**

On September 20, 2022 at a convention of the Building Trades of Alberta (BTA), and at an April 21, 2023 Alberta Federation of Labour convention, your party signaled its intention to implement a “Community Benefits Agreement” regime in Alberta to maximize the participation of underemployed worker groups. We believe CBAs, when designed to be fair, open and transparent, can achieve meaningful social procurement objectives.

However, these reports note that a new NDP government may look to B.C. as a template for a broader CBA program. We sincerely hope this is a misprint. The B.C. program, designed by former Premier John Horgan’s NDP government, is in reality a grossly coercive program aimed at giving select B.C. Building Trades Unions a monopoly over large parts of the province’s multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects. Companies wishing to do work on these projects must do so using exclusively Building Trades Union (BTU) labour and terms, regardless of which labour model they are affiliated with. Given that B.C.’s BTU workers constitute no more than 15% of the province’s skilled construction workforce, this means that the other 85% are excluded from public work that is paid for by their own tax dollars. We trust you will agree that this arrangement is grossly unfair, anti-competitive and punishes companies and their workers for choices they have freely made.

If this is a misunderstanding, it can easily be cleared up. Alberta’s construction community would be greatly reassured if you affirmed that all public infrastructure programs, including any conducted under a future CBA regime, will be open to all Alberta construction companies and their workers regardless of the labour model they have freely chosen to employ. It’s that simple. Our industry associations are ready and willing to constructively work with parties across the political spectrum, to pursue social procurement objectives that are fair, meaningful, and productive.

## **“Double Breasting”**

Your party has also pledged to do away with “double breasting” in the construction and maintenance sectors.

“Double breasting” is a term that arises out of Labour Relations Board decisions across Canada. It is not - and lawfully cannot be -- a creation of employers. It arises only when employees, within a group of businesses, decide to be represented by a union that is different from another union representing the employees of another company within that corporate group. When there are different unions representing separate employees within separate companies -- or there is a non-union business in the group -- the “label” that is applied from the labour relations perspective, is that the overall business is “double” or “triple breasted.”

No single source of workers has been sufficient to meet the workforce required to construct all of Alberta’s capital and infrastructure projects, whether those workers are craft or progressive, union, non-union, from employee associations, or from outside the province. Healthy competition has resulted in union and non-union employers offering high pay, comprehensive benefit packages, training and learning and development including outstanding workplace health and safety, family counselling services, and other employee supports. Indeed, construction is among the highest paying professions in Alberta, well above the average for all industries and occupations.

One of Alberta’s distinct advantages is that large scale construction projects, like the oil sands and petrochemical sectors, as well as major infrastructure, have been built and maintained using craft union, non-union, and progressively unionized workers – productively working side by side. Labour diversity is the reason Alberta’s construction sector is so competitive and so successful in attracting massive investment dollars. Over the last 30 years, Alberta’s construction workforce has grown to become the province’s third largest private sector employer. Any ill-advised tinkering with the corporate structure of construction and maintenance firms, is a misguided attempt to address perceived issues with “double breasting” and would fly in the face of growth, success, and the tremendous variety of options for skilled trades workers. At minimum, we would want to see industry-wide consultations before such drastic policy changes are enacted.

## **Conclusion**

As you know, Alberta is in the midst of the “Alberta is Calling” campaign rightly aimed at attracting workers from other provinces, including skilled trades workers from under-utilized groups such as youth, women, immigrants, and Indigenous Peoples. The policy changes under consideration could send a very different message: that Alberta is really only calling upon a select few, at a time when the province’s construction industry faces a dire and growing shortage of skilled labour.

We trust this is not your intent. So, we ask that your party clarify its position on these two crucial policy initiatives before the upcoming election. All of Alberta’s construction workers – one in ten Albertans -- deserve to know your intentions before casting their ballot.

We respectfully ask you to consider the rights of ALL Alberta workers and companies before changing what has worked so well for this province, our communities, and our families.

Sincerely,



**Paul de Jong, President  
Progressive Contractors Association  
of Canada**



**Ken Gibson, Executive Director  
Alberta Construction Association**



**Mike Martens, President  
ICBA, Alberta**



### Who we are

**The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA)** represents construction companies whose members employ 35,000 skilled workers across Canada. Their workers have built major construction projects across Alberta, from the Oil Sands and Rogers Place to the Calgary Cancer Centre and Stoney Trail. That represents a LOT of good paying jobs for Albertans. [www.pcac.ca](http://www.pcac.ca)

**The Alberta Construction Association's (ACA)** 2500 members include general contractors, trade contractors of all disciplines and suppliers. Members utilize various labour affiliations including Building Trades, CLAC, and non-union. ACA members focus on commercial and institutional construction, providing the facilities that Albertans rely on. <http://albertaconstruction.net>

**ICBA Alberta** is part of the largest construction association in Canada, represents open shop construction and energy industry members, with advocacy, training, wellness, and other services. ICBA Benefits is one of the leading independent providers of group health and retirement benefits in western Canada, supporting more than 150,000 Canadians. [www.icbaalberta.ca](http://www.icbaalberta.ca)