



Unlocking Alberta's Potential

Post-secondary's promise to transform our communities - June 2012

Following the beginnings of economic recovery, Alberta is facing new challenges and opportunities. Across our country Canadians are talking about the role universities and university students are going to play in our society. From the streets of Montreal to the recent Alberta election post-secondary education is being talked about as the long-term solution to securing our potential as a world leader.

Students' unions worked hard in the last election to get students out to vote, ensuring that their voice would be heard on April 23. As government returns to work, we look forward to implementing the government's mandate with an eye to improving Alberta's post-secondary participation rate, which currently is *the lowest in Canada*.

Student leaders are similarly eager to get down to work, having just finished our elections on campus and new councils being sworn in on May 1.

WHO WE ARE

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents the over 70,000 undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge to the government, the public and to other stakeholders.

As elected student leaders from all three institutions, we advocate on behalf of our students, to university administrations, the government and the greater community. We also govern our individual students' unions in order to improve the services we provide students.

Each of our executive members was elected on a platform that speaks to the need for investment in our institutions and to keep post-secondary education affordable. Our priorities reflect those mandates.

2012/13 PRIORITIES

Restoring the provincial tuition cap

Tying tuition increases at Alberta's post-secondary institutions to inflation, starting in 2006, was a

watershed moment in setting a policy that makes sense for students and their families, institutions, and the government.

A *one-time* deviation from the tuition cap was permitted for six programs in 2010 to account for pre-existing discrepancies resulting from freezing and capping tuition in 2004. Following a strong commitment by the Premier in the election to maintain Alberta's tuition cap for the long term, the time has come to *formally close the loophole* on future increases beyond the tuition cap.

Students are calling for the tuition cap to be put back into the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* and to remove any future possibility increases beyond CPI without approval from the Alberta Legislature.

Regulating mandatory non-instructional fees

During the recent economic downturn several of Alberta's post-secondary institutions turned to unregulated non-instructional fees to make up fiscal shortfalls. These mandatory fees are being levied *over and above* tuition and have been put in place without offering any discernable additional value or services to students. These unaccountable fees shift the cost of delivering services previously funded by provincial base operating grants and tuition onto students a separate fees. Alberta now has the *highest non-instructional fees in Canada*, averaging at \$1,399, with the newly introduced fees being as high as \$450 a year at the University of Calgary.

Students are not opposed to all fees, however, with our campuses having introduced valuable fees covering services such as universal transit passes, physical activity centres, and, of course, students' union fees. In each of these cases students themselves proved the best judge of the value received, with approval coming following a student referendum. CAUS continues to call on government to regulate non-instructional fees, allowing for fee increases only after student approval either through referendum or our students' councils.

UNLOCKING ALBERTA'S POTENTIAL

Removing the barriers to student voting

The 2012 provincial election was the first time many students got to vote in Alberta, and CAUS was excited to run our biggest campaign ever, aimed at getting students out to vote. On election day we phoned and spoke with over 10,000 students to make sure they got out and cast a ballot. Sadly, we also heard from many students that getting a ballot was difficult and, in some cases, impossible.

Alberta's election laws are *archaic* when it comes to access for post-secondary students, and needs reform. CAUS is recommending three ways we can improve our system to increase voter turnout in the 2016 election:

- Allow students to choose between their home during studies and their family home to be their ordinary residence
- Establish advance voting stations on campus
- Permit advance voting for all electoral divisions at any advance voting station

Increasing post-secondary participation among rural and aboriginal Albertans

Starting in 2009 Alberta has shifted our student aid system away from mixed system of loans, bursaries, debt relief, and grants to a system focused on financial aid through student debt. We have been looking to the government to establish a new bursary focused on improving our dismal post-secondary participation rate - the worst in Canada - and are excited to see the establishment of a new bursary aimed at under-represented rural and aboriginal Albertans at the heart of Premier Redford's new mandate.

The promised \$17 million a year bursary will be an important measure in getting Albertans from all corners of the province into a university, college, or technical institute program - *if implemented properly*.

CAUS is committed to working with Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to get the new bursary program implemented properly - so it can meet its policy objectives of: getting those students, who otherwise would be unable to attend, into their chosen program with the goal of academic success.

Eliminating property taxes on residences

Alberta is the *only jurisdiction in Canada* that allows municipalities to levy property taxes on post-secondary residences - a practice that has inhibited construction of new residences makes it more expensive for institutions to operate residences and for students to live in them. As residences on our campuses are run on a cost-recovery basis property taxes have made student rents higher and resulting in institutions choosing to defer regular maintenance in our residences.

The deferred maintenance bill on our campus residences have grown dramatically - and now represents a serious financial risk for the future of these buildings as well as a serious safety hazard for our students' health. Students are calling for an elimination of property taxes on residences in order to use those funds to address deferred maintenance and make our residences into a place students can *live and study in safety*.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

CAUS has already begun advocating on these priorities to government, but we need your help to make these priorities a reality for our public post-secondary system.

We are encouraging decision-makers from across Alberta to bring up post-secondary education when considering our province's priorities. Together we can make a highly skilled workforce and a educated population where everyone has the opportunity to succeed at the centre of our economic and social strategies.

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