

Date: 10/20/20

To: Students' Union Council

Re: Vice President External 2020/21 Report 10/20/20

Hello Council,

I hope you're all doing well and enjoying first snow! It has been a very busy couple weeks, and some big projects will be coming to fruition very soon. Of course, it's also midterm season and Halloween-- I'm not sure which is spookier to me.

Alberta 2030: Ongoing Consultation

The Alberta 2030 post-secondary review is continuing, and I am now attending biweekly rather than weekly guiding coalition meetings. We are also assured by the Ministry that 6-8 town halls will still be hosted where students, staff, and other stakeholders will have a chance to share their input, though their timing is still unclear. The government has also released public surveys on Alberta 2030 and changes to post-secondary, which are surprisingly thorough and fair. The surveys address some key issues we have raised, especially around needs-based grants. This is an encouraging sign that our advocacy is leading to some progress, even on a difficult issue like financial aid. Take a look at the student survey below:

<https://extranet.gov.ab.ca/opinio6/s?s=AEStudent>

2021-22 Provincial Budget

The provincial government has started the planning process for the 2021 budget. As many of you have heard, the Premier has been warning of an impending "fiscal reckoning". The Minister of Finance has said that all departments should anticipate cuts, and the government is rolling back political staff salaries by 7%. This suggests a broader public sector rollback may be in the cards. There is no doubt this budget will be a very painful one.

How exactly the budget will affect PSE, we don't know. We anticipated a 20% cut to Advanced Education in the next three budgets, but it is possible that the upcoming cut will be larger. U of A was already struggling to absorb the scale of cuts we know are coming, but a larger cut may create a more acute crisis.

The government is running a series of surveys on the provincial budget. They are surprisingly fair and well-designed, and while they don't guarantee any outcomes, it's worth filling them out. Take a look at the survey and other engagement opportunities here:

<https://www.alberta.ca/budget-2021-consultation.aspx>

CAUS Campaign

CAUS will very shortly be launching our first online campaign of the COVID era-- and it will probably not be the last. For this one, we are following a fairly well established method with a letter-writing tool which will send responses to ministerial offices and MLAs. We will also be able to harvest the responses for use in our advocacy. Many other media and public engagement elements will be included in the campaign. I want to stress that this is not the end of our public campaign work this year. This is the beginning and is partly meant to be a learning exercise to develop our ability to run more complex, ambitious online campaigns.

Standing Desk Manufacturers Hate Him!

To finish on a brief personal note, we have all been spending a lot of time on computers lately, and the impact on posture and health of sitting at a desk all day is huge. I wanted to try a standing desk to see if it would help, but I'm not about to dish out hundreds of dollars on what's literally just a taller ergonomic desk. Fortunately, if you want to build a standing desk, it's pretty easy-- you just need a shelf, two large boxes, and a piece of plywood. To look extra good on Zoom you can also add some lights!



The standing desk approach isn't for everyone, but we all need to watch out for our health right now-- mental and physical. Take care and enjoy the beginnings of winter!
Sincerely,



University of Alberta Students' Union Vice President External
Rowan Ley