

November 13th, 2014

To: Students' Council

Re: Report to Council

Dear Council,

What a week! I hope you found time to relax as well as study during our long-weekend! This has been a very, very fast-paced week and a half with a lot of things evolving. Unfortunately, I will be away from Council since I will be in Ottawa lobbying Members of Parliament on student issues. Definitely let me know if you have questions or want to chat!

The last time I officially corresponded with Council was when I submitted to you my report regarding the details of the Rally. It's attached at the end of this report as an information item.

Over the long weekend, I'm really happy to say that I reached out to every single Councillor at least once. It's no surprise by now that a letter was sent around to select individuals regarding concerns about the Rally. It was signed by 16 people and of those 16, everyone who has gotten back to me is fine with the Rally, and in fact, supports it, with the exception of a couple individuals. VP Hodgson and I also hosted an information session to which three Councillors came. Despite the low turnout, we had some really good conversations!

The next few days are going to be very high profile for post-secondary education in Alberta. The new University of Alberta President will be announced *tomorrow* (November 14th!) and the Rally is on Monday! Those are big media events that will help us keep postsecondary on the minds of the public.

As you may have seen in the Gateway, students at the U of A had a really neat opportunity to meet with Minister Don Scott on Monday. This was an informal opportunity for other students to get a crack at external advocacy, sort of like the cherry on top of our usual business meetings. A huge thanks to Governor Hansra who could make this possible through his relationship with Minister Scott! Additionally, MLAs Matt Jeneroux and Steve Young were in attendance – some of the biggest champions of postsecondary, especially the University of Alberta.

Today, Advanced Education Minister, Don Scott, called me to officially notify us that he will be delaying the decision on the market modifier proposals. This can be looked at a couple different ways. On the plus side, I prefer the Ministry take the time to go through the proposals and consider the implications rather than making a rushed decision. On the other hand, the longer this is pushed back and in the case there *are* tuition hikes, it will impact the University budget process. Furthermore, it will mean less time for students to financially prepare. Some may interpret this delay as a partial “win”, others may be concerned that this will be announced at a time when students are not paying attention, such as during final exams. At this point, I remain on the positive end of the spectrum.

Regardless, this does *not* render the Rally useless. The point is, this time of year is absolutely *crucial* for the government since they are in the budget planning process. By getting hundreds of students out there now, we visibly show the Minister, the Premier, all other MLAs, and the public that students are willing to put in the effort to demand that government prioritize our futures. This is not meant to antagonize anyone, nor should it if you think about it. Students rallying at the legislature also translate into students voting, and government is *always* receptive to that.

So, I've been working on making sure this Rally is a success since I got back from Toronto. I'm happy to say that the marketing is going well as is outreach. I really think we could use more of a push here though – there's only so many class-talks and one-on-ones a handful of people can do!

Let's put this situation into a broader context – During the Progressive Conservative Leadership race, we heard from now Premier Prentice that he would reinvest in terms of more funding for postsecondary. I'm already hearing rumors from credible sources that it will no longer be happening. Furthermore, in 2016, the Tuition and Fees Regulation, which is part of the Post-Secondary Learning Act, is set to expire. That means it could either be renewed as is, or it could be changed. That makes me slightly nervous. The way things seem right now, I am sometimes uncertain that we will even have our tuition cap in the coming years, something that students have worked long and hard for. Having tuition tied to a measure of inflation is a really good and reasonable middle ground.

Other News

We still have to set up the details, but after our Council meeting on December 2nd, Students' Council is invited to a meet and greet with MLA Steve Young (Edmonton Riverview)! This should be fun! MLA Young is very active with the university community. Stay tuned for more details.

Conclusion

With all that said, I truly hope Councillors make a strong showing at the Rally – if we are not here for our students and for postsecondary now, then when? As always, I am available to answer your questions. If you have questions or concerns regarding the Rally during the Council meeting, please direct them to VP Hodgson, as President Lau and I will be absent.

See you Monday! ;)



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