

The Advocate

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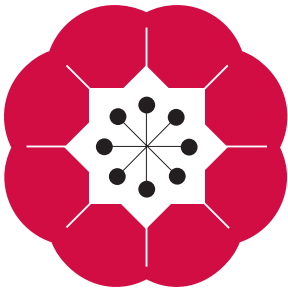
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The Advocate

We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter. It is intended to be a space to share stories and tools for advocacy. *The Advocate* is published three times a year.

Who We Are

Public Interest Alberta (PIA) is a province-wide organization focused on advocacy and education on public interest issues. Founded in 2004, PIA exists to foster an understanding of the importance of public services, institutions, and spaces in Albertans' lives, and to build a network of organizations and individuals committed to advancing the public interest.

We believe that the primary responsibility of government is to advance the collective interests of the citizens of Alberta. This entails a commitment to accessibility, equity, inclusion, and democracy in our communities, institutions and society.

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Share Your Thoughts

Submit letters, articles and contributions, (which may be edited) for the next issue of *The Advocate*. Send all correspondence to:

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TUESDAY

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Getting Albertans on board for a #GreenNewDeal

By Bronwen Tucker

Prairie Organizer with Council of Canadians



I was in Ottawa on February 19th when the pro-pipeline, anti-immigrant, and ultra-conservative “United We Roll” convoy arrived from their drive across the Prairies. But unlike these yellow-vest clad Albertans, I was there for a youth-run climate convergence called Powershift, where we had just finished crafting a very different plan for jobs and our collective future than the one being hawked by the convoy participants. As young people facing down not just worsening climate change, but worsening economic inequality, racism, and labour precarity too, we know we need climate change solutions that also uphold Indigenous rights, protect workers, and build stronger communities. So, we had spent much of the convergence talking about how to bring the concept of a Green New Deal – an ambitious and equality-minded climate policy package that has been gaining ground in the United States – north of the border.

While the United We Roll convoy was much smaller in number than initially reported (about 50 rather than 2000 trucks showed up) I know their concerns about Alberta’s flagging oil industry are not in the minority in this province. Left unaddressed by our governments, I really worry for the potential for the hateful elements of groups like Canada’s Yellow Vests to grow stronger.

Ultimately, the young people crafting a Green New Deal at Powershift have a lot in common with the folks who participated in the convoy. We worry about finding jobs that can sustain us, and about governments and corporations who do not seem to care about our struggles. But unlike

the Canadian Yellow Vest movement, we see increasing automation and an international move away from oil and know that further expansion and reliance on the oil sands cannot provide us stable jobs. We know climate change is real, already here, and rapidly accelerating. And we know it is impossible for Canada to fulfill its climate commitments while continuing to expand the oil sands by building new pipelines and mines.

So instead of pipelines, we are calling for a Green New Deal. This means a credible plan to get to 100% renewable energy by 2030, a federal living-wage job guarantee for all, meaningfully implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the expansion of low-carbon sectors like health care, child care, seniors’ care, public transit, affordable housing, ecological agriculture, oil well reclamation, renewable energy, IT, and education. It also means ending subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and implementing a moratorium on new projects so we can gradually phase away while there is still time.

Obviously, these are lofty proposals. But they seem that way in part because we have never made space to have this conversation in this province. Though Premier Notley has made some modest progress on climate policy, we ultimately need her to tell a different story, that we need to be planning for the world that is moving on from oil, instead of trying to out-conservative the Conservatives at squeezing out as many barrels of oil while we still can. This lack of willingness to make room for a conversation about what a transition could look like has contributed to the fact that adequate climate action continues to be outside of what seems politically possible in this province. But I do think this is a reality we can shift. Whenever I have talked to other Albertans in person about the need to transition, what that transition could look like, and how we can protect workers through it, they are overwhelmingly open to it.

Regardless of the outcome of this upcoming provincial election, the Council of Canadians and our allies across many different social movements will be spending this year making space for this conversation in Alberta and getting a real, just transition to a renewable economy into our political discourse. We will be building connections across labour, migrant justice, Indigenous land defence, and many other struggles by knocking on doors, holding town halls, tabling at community centres, and building a student climate strike movement. Join us!



Alberta Seniors Deserve Better

Alberta Seniors Deserve Better is a campaign by **Public Interest Alberta** and **Friends of Medicare**.

In this election, we need to talk about how our loved ones will be cared for.



Public Interest Alberta teamed up with Friends of Medicare to produce a series of four videos to kick off the campaign Alberta Seniors Deserve Better in advance of the 2019 provincial election.

The campaign, with ads directed and written by **Abdul Mailk**, highlights the issues facing seniors in the continuing care system, and encourages Albertans to sign a petition to call on all of Alberta's political parties to make strengthening seniors' care a top priority in the 2019 provincial election.

The campaign tackles four main issue areas facing Alberta's seniors in the current continuing care system: high out-of-pocket costs shouldered by seniors and their families for essentials like medications and personal items, the complexity of the referral system that makes accessing care confusing and difficult, the lack of legislation to mandate staff-to-patient ratios in seniors' care, and finally, the profit motivation that comes with corporations providing much of our seniors' care.

Alberta's seniors have worked hard their entire lives to contribute to our province and deserve to live in dignity with high quality care. "This should be an election issue," said Carol Wodak, a senior and member of the Public Interest Alberta Seniors' Task Force at the March 5 video premiere. She added, "Caring for our vulnerable seniors now, caring for ourselves when we reach that point, ought to be a priority. Much more than saving any money, which in fact doesn't save us money in the end."

Join us in calling on all of Alberta's political parties to make strengthening seniors' care a top priority in the 2019 provincial election. All parties must prioritize the public services that are so important to the health and well-being of Albertans — especially our seniors. Alberta seniors deserve better.

Learn More and Take Action at ABSeniors.ca



Despite the results in BC, electoral reform is alive and kicking

By Peter Adamski

Fair Vote Canada, Edmonton chapter

The results of the BC referendum shocked many of us at Fair Vote Canada, Edmonton chapter. “I will completely commence crawling into a hole,” said one member in an email on the day of the announcement. For us the numbers were particularly disappointing. Sixty-one per cent of the voters chose to remain with the status quo, first-past-the-post (FPTP). This from a province that voted 58 per cent in favour of proportional representation (PR) in 2005, only to be denied by the government of the day because the result hadn’t exceeded the threshold of 60 per cent. Never has any BC government won 60 percent of the vote (the conservatives came close in 1912 when they received 59.65 per cent).

Much has been written about why electoral reform lost the referendum, but for me this is what stands out. In 2005 the BC government conducted a citizens’ assembly that studied PR systems of voting, and after examining these systems closely, chose a variant of Single Transferable Vote (STV). Compare that to the 2019 referendum, where there was no citizens’ assembly. But in its place, there was relentless and dishonest fear mongering campaign from the “No” side, citing extreme possibilities with no root in reality.

Despite the disappointment in BC, the future for electoral reform in Canada looks bright.

In Prince Edward Island, voters will soon have a referendum on electoral reform, their third vote on the issue since 2005. This time they’ll be asked to choose between FPTP and mixed member proportional (MMP), the voting system that received the highest number of votes in their 2016 plebiscite. MMP gives voters two votes: one for their candidate of choice, the other for their party of choice. To prepare the public for the vote, expected this spring, the government is conducting at least 15 public engagement sessions.

In Quebec there is a very active push for electoral reform. In an unusual alliance, three of the four major parties, representing 76 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly, signed an agreement vowing they will change the provincial voting system from FPTP to MMP.

Coalition Avenir Quebec, the governing party, is not dragging its heels on the issue. Late February they announced they will



table an electoral reform bill before October 1, 2019, and that the bill would not include a referendum.

“It’s not that we rule out the fact we have to consult, we rule out this way of consulting,” said Quebec Justice Minister Sonia LeBel. Instead, CAQ will adopt a more participatory approach. The plan is to create a nonpartisan group that will engage and educate the public on the MMP system of voting.

On the national stage, although Justin Trudeau promised (more than 1800 times by MP Nathan Cullen’s count) to make 2015 the last election under FPTP, he broke his word. Yet, if election 2019 delivers a minority government with the NDP and Greens holding the balance of power, don’t be surprised if it shows up again on the agenda.

Now what about Alberta?

Early childhood education must be an election priority for all political parties

By Joel French

Public Interest Alberta Executive Director

Extensive research on children's development confirms that the first five years of children's lives are critical for healthy development, including brain growth. Conditions and experiences in those early years significantly affect a child's physical, psychological, and social development. The lack of opportunities for fuller development starting in the early years of a child's life increases the probability of later issues related to mental health and learning capacity, and makes for greater vulnerability to addictions and conditions that can lead to homelessness and negative interactions with the criminal justice system.

Key determinants of healthy development in the early years are living in a household free from poverty and having meaningful learning opportunities from the earliest ages.

Recent data from Statistics Canada shows Alberta is rapidly improving in the area of child poverty, as lower income households benefit from significant child and family benefits from the federal and provincial governments. Alberta's higher minimum wage has also made a big difference to lift families out of poverty. When parents are relieved of having to live on poverty-level wages, households are healthier environments to live in, and basic necessities are much easier for parents to provide for their kids.

Another policy in Alberta that is starting to make a significant positive impact on our children is the provincial government's Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Centres program, often referred to as the \$25-a-day child care program. There are 122 child care centres in the province currently receiving three-year blocks of public funding to make their fees more affordable, to make care more accessible for families with higher-needs children, and to increase the quality of the care in those centres.

The issue of quality in child care and early learning environments is something the public is just beginning to understand, but it is extremely important in helping children develop in those early years. High quality public services rely on skilled professionals, like doctors and nurses in hospitals, teachers and educational assistants in our schools, and social workers in programs that serve our most vulnerable residents. Likewise, in child care and early learning, we require early childhood educators with a high level of training and



opportunities for ongoing professional development, but we are not there yet in much of Alberta's child care sector.

Currently, quality child care can be difficult for parents to find and is often accompanied by long waiting lists. High quality child care is also expensive to provide, usually meaning high fees for parents. Even for Albertans trained to work in good-paying jobs, the disincentive of high fees for quality child care can keep them out of the workforce. Alternatively, they may seek lower-quality child care settings where they can afford the fees.

Quality care is expensive because education for child care professionals, like many other fields, is expensive. High quality care means staff with at least a two-year diploma in early learning and child care, along with ongoing professional development after that. Attracting students to enter that field of studies and later keeping them employed as front-line professionals means ensuring they are well compensated for the valuable work they do.

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Early childhood education

Con't from page 7

The Alberta government's ELCC program shows that there is a path forward for families where they do not have to choose between quality and affordability of care. With significant government investment, child care centres can employ skilled early childhood educators while still keeping fees affordable.

The problem is that the ELCC program is currently only a pilot project and the funding is only enough to reach a small percentage of Alberta's child care centres. Although there are other centres already providing high quality care without government funding, parents can only access those by having to pay much higher fees. The pilot project shows enormous success and is clearly

showing us the way forward. What we need is for this pilot program to be made permanent and for it to be expanded to every corner of the province. Healthy early childhood development is not only in the interest of the child and family, but also is a key part of building a healthy society for all of us; it is in the public interest.

In the upcoming provincial election, Albertans must demand of all political parties a commitment to expanding public investment in high quality, affordable, and accessible early learning and child care for all families.

PUBLIC INTEREST ALBERTA'S 13TH ANNUAL ADVOCACY CONFERENCE

Education
Environment
Democracy Revenue Reform
**OUR PUBLIC SERVICES:
PROTECTING AND REVITALIZING
IN UNCERTAIN TIMES**
Human Services
and Poverty
Childcare and Early Learning
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Keynote Address by

TRISH HENNESSY

Executive Director of Upstream
(April 3 in Calgary)



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