



Public Interest Alberta
Advocating for a Better Alberta for All

Annual Report

2020 – 2021

President's Report

REPORT



At the time of Public Interest Alberta's 16th Annual General Meeting in 2020, we were four months into a surreal experience brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Most of us did not expect that fifteen months after that virtual gathering, we would still be operating in this alternate reality as we collectively challenge the arrogant and insidious actions of the current provincial government.

The unwavering dedication of public servants and other frontline workers around the province resulted in overt and widespread praise and thanks from the vast majority of Albertans. Yet, the UCP government did not flinch in its determination to expand private delivery of public services as it attacked workers' rights and democratic processes, while turning its back on federal support designed to ease the economic stress on workers and small businesses.

At present, according to research conducted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, approximately \$1.8 billion in federal support is available to Alberta but remains untapped by the UCP government.

These potentially life-saving resources sit unused as Alberta municipalities struggle to support a growing number of homeless Albertans, and the UCP government blocks access to much-needed funding.

They sit while this government demands rollbacks of the hard-earned salaries and working conditions of nurses and doctors. They sit while thousands of vulnerable workers caring for seniors in congregate care facilities still work second jobs to feed their families.

In the course of the next two years, we have municipal and school board elections, a federal

election and, finally, a provincial election in 2023. The brain trust and organizational power within Public Interest Alberta, our constituent organizations, and respective memberships is formidable. We must continue to rally that strength as we fight back in sustained and collaborative ways.

I would be remiss without highlighting the changes within PIA within the last year. Two long-standing members of our staff, Executive Director, Joel French, and Finance and Administration Officer, Monica Walker, have both moved to positions with other progressive organizations in B.C. and Alberta respectively. We are pleased to welcome Executive Director, Brad Lafortune, and Finance and Administration Officer, Deanne Timmons, to their first AGM - the first of many, I trust.

I would like to thank our Director of Communications, Laura Kruse, for her excellent leadership and support throughout these staff transitions. Laura carried the torch for PIA and continued our core work with ease and consistency.

I also extend my sincere thanks to members of the executive committee for being available during the staff transitions for those simple things like keeping the bills paid. My thanks also to the Board of Directors for their ongoing guidance and direction for the organization.

We have challenging years ahead and our collective actions matter!

— Terry Price, President

Executive Director Report

REPORT



I feel honoured and privileged to be taking on this work in the footsteps of past Executive Director Joel French, who has been a generous resource to me for years, especially these past months. As a father, advocate and ally here on Treaty 6 territory, I am so, so humbled and proud to be joining you in my first full year as the Executive Director of Public Interest Alberta.

I have been uplifted and inspired by the commitment and sense of justice that guides the work of our membership, staff, and Board. I want to extend a special thank-you to Terry Price who, as our Board Chair, has provided effortless leadership and a steady hand to help guide us through a lot of transition.

We have focused on building and reorganizing our staff team. Laura Kruse has taken on a new role as our Director of Communications and Organizing, after steadfastly serving as our Communications Officer and Deanne Timmons joins us as our new Finance and Administration Officer. I want to thank both of them for their energy, spirit, and commitment to our cause.

Of course, we must be responsive to new realities in order to sustain our work and build our organization. This means, for all of us, building and deepening relationships of trust and demonstrated value. I believe our movements have always benefited most when they have been open to change and growth. Recently, we have been focused on our equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-oppression work, with our staff, board and membership bringing a renewed commitment to measurable progress and real outcomes.

Living through COVID and under an austerity-driven government has stretched us all; it has also reminded us of a fundamentally important lesson: community and social justice cannot be taken for granted. We are currently engaged in strategic planning for the first time in several years, and at the same time we have embarked on a revitalization of our task forces, which will serve to make our work even more responsive, strategic and impactful as an organization.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we are reminded of the source of our strength and our potential power. I believe Public Interest Alberta is poised to make progress, in its capacity, relevance, and impact.

The ideas and energy we have generated together this past year will continue to focus our work and ensure we are advocating strongly for the next year, and years to come.

To our members: I believe in your leadership. I have seen it coursing through our organization, and I would like to thank each and every one of you for that leadership. Waking up and showing up to this work each day is a great privilege. Without you, Public Interest Alberta and, indeed, our province would not be nearly as strong. Together, we will continue building a better Alberta for all.

— Bradley Lafortune, Executive Director

Child Care & Early Learning Task Force

REPORT

Donna Staszewski

“If we as a society want to achieve the best in child care, then we need a universal, publicly funded and publicly delivered child-care system.

And we need to move away from thinking of child care as a marketplace for profit to a public good for our society and future. This is why investment into a universal system of high quality, accessible and affordable child care is the way to go.”

— Bradley Lafortune, Opinion Editorial

Public Interest Alberta Child Care and Early Learning task force membership is made up of child care and early learning organizations and educators who care deeply about early learning and child care. Task force members meet to share information, problem solve and look for ways to collectively advocate for early childhood education and child care. One of the goals of the task force is to ensure that tangible actions and plans emerge from our work.

Highlights

Task force members meet on a regular basis to share concerns and challenges and plan future strategies for the task force.

Task force members are amazing leaders in early learning and child care. PIA is richer for the discussions held and can advocate in a better way because of the work of our members.

Currently the task force is reviewing and revising the guiding priorities for the Child Care and Early Learning Task Force and our Vision Statement, quoted below, will ground our work as we move forward.



Vision Statement:

“Build a comprehensive, high-quality, affordable, publicly funded and publicly delivered early childhood education and care system accessible to all families, regardless of their ability to pay”

A task force working group is initiating a process of connecting with parents to share information about the need for a universal, high quality, affordable and accessible early learning and child care publicly funded child care system. Bringing parents and caregivers together to advocate for their children.

A third task force working group is developing a communication plan and structure to share and promote child care and early learning actions and events within and for organizations, providing information to support Public Interest Alberta staff in communications development and also sending this information to parents and community partners.

The biennial survey of child care operators was conducted. This is a huge opportunity to focus on the importance of early learning and child care. From the discussion around the results of the survey, a wonderfully successful “\$10-a-day child care campaign” was created by the task force and Public Interest Alberta staff and has dominated our social media and media coverage. It has been a very successful way to communicate with parents, families, workers, advocates, and Albertans the broader value and importance of a child care system in Alberta.

Challenges and Emergent Issues

On April 19, 2021, the federal government announced a \$30 billion investment over the next five years to set up a national child care program. Many provinces and territories in Canada have signed on to this national program; however, the UCP government, though beginning talks with the federal government, has not come close to implementing a national system of accessible, affordable, and high quality child care for every working family in Alberta that needs it.

Our biggest challenge and opportunity for our children, for women, and for families is to work together as task force members with our Public Interest Alberta members and community to reach our goal of universally accessible, fully publicly funded and publicly delivered child care for every working family in Alberta.

Democracy Task Force

REPORT

Hans Smits

A strong, vibrant and resilient democracy based on principles of equity, fairness, and meaningful public participation is a critical foundation of public life and protecting public services in the interests of all Albertans. Those principles have guided the work of the task force and helped to inform targeted advocacy related to strengthening democratic practices in the province. While the Democracy Task Force's mandate is to focus on particular democratic issues and processes and identify critical areas for advocacy related to the public interest, democratic participation and engagement is integral to all of Public Interest Alberta's task forces.

Highlights

Underwent a process of renewal and reflection on its future work, with a focus on both long-term and short-term goals for the task force.

Short Term Goals:

- Focusing on campaign finance and electoral spending in municipal elections and the influence of the new legislation on the elections; disclosing sources of funding to Political Action Committees (PACs) and individual candidates.
- Encouraging citizen engagement in municipal elections.
- Providing important information and contributing to understanding of key issues in municipal elections in both urban and rural communities.

Identified several possibilities for Public Interest Alberta engagement before and during the municipal elections, for example, holding virtual forums on municipal issues, short videos and other formats on key issues, collaborating with other groups and organizations that share PIA's perspectives on democracy and the public interest.

Challenges

UCP government's affront to democratic principles. Key issues for the work of the task force in both shorter and longer term include electoral finance, challenging legislative actions that limit the power of unions and restrict fairness and equity in electoral participation.

Initiating further work on developing outreach strategies through building coalitions with others in collaborating on advocacy for democratic rights and participation, including unions, parent groups, community organizations and NGOs who share Public Interest Alberta's vision and interests.

The need for internal task force renewal and greater diversity on the Democracy Task Force

Emergent Issues

Rebuilding concerted efforts for advocacy for democracy in Alberta

Greater citizen participation – not just in electoral politics, but through meaningful democratic participation with diverse civil society organizations and associations with shared progressive interests

Understanding of the needs and interests of people and groups in an increasingly diverse society, and how they relate to democratic institutions.

Education Task Force

REPORT

Harold Neth

The Education Task Force advocates to protect and strengthen public education systems in Alberta. It is a dedicated group that works for improvements in classroom conditions for Alberta's students. This includes calling on the government to reduce class sizes and develop mandatory class size targets, increase supports in classrooms to respond to increasingly complex needs, and improve early learning opportunities that enhance lifelong learning.

Highlights

Some members attended a rally protesting the provincial government's budget and its impact on students.

An op-ed which challenged the government's new elementary curriculum

Continued to closely monitor school and classroom conditions

Challenges

The provincial government maintains funding levels for private schools while cutting funding and programming to public schools.

Field testing and implementation of a very flawed elementary curriculum.

Teacher and support staff burnout amidst continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mix of in-school and learning from home.

Emergent Issues

Continued revitalization of the task force's priorities and advocacy, responding to the current challenges posed by the UCP government and proposing proactive alternatives for a strengthened public system for education.

No real plan from Alberta Education for school opening amidst the 4th wave of COVID -19 has parents and educators worried and angry at what will happen to children.

Frequent public demonstrations against the abandonment of COVID protocols has caused the government to hit pause on some of these.

Snap federal election interjects into the fall school board and municipal elections



Environment Task Force

REPORT

Alison McIntosh

After an extended period of inactivity, the Environment Task Force reconvened in May 2021. Recognizing the urgency of the climate crisis, and the powerful opportunities to take climate action in Alberta, the Environment Task Force aims to build campaigns that respond to local needs. Over the next several months, we will develop our first campaign that reflects the values and membership of Public Interest Alberta.

Highlights

The task force had an inaugural meeting in May 2021 to talk about overall goals, challenges, and the state of affairs in Alberta's environmental discourse.

We made a plan to meet this fall to make a mission/vision and set up our first campaign.

We identified unique opportunities for the task force to provide leadership in organizing within Alberta's environmental networks.

Challenges

We need more engagement from board members and their organizations to grow the task force's capacity and to set a good direction for our work.

We need to change the narrative that an accelerated transition from fossil fuels is both possible and necessary.

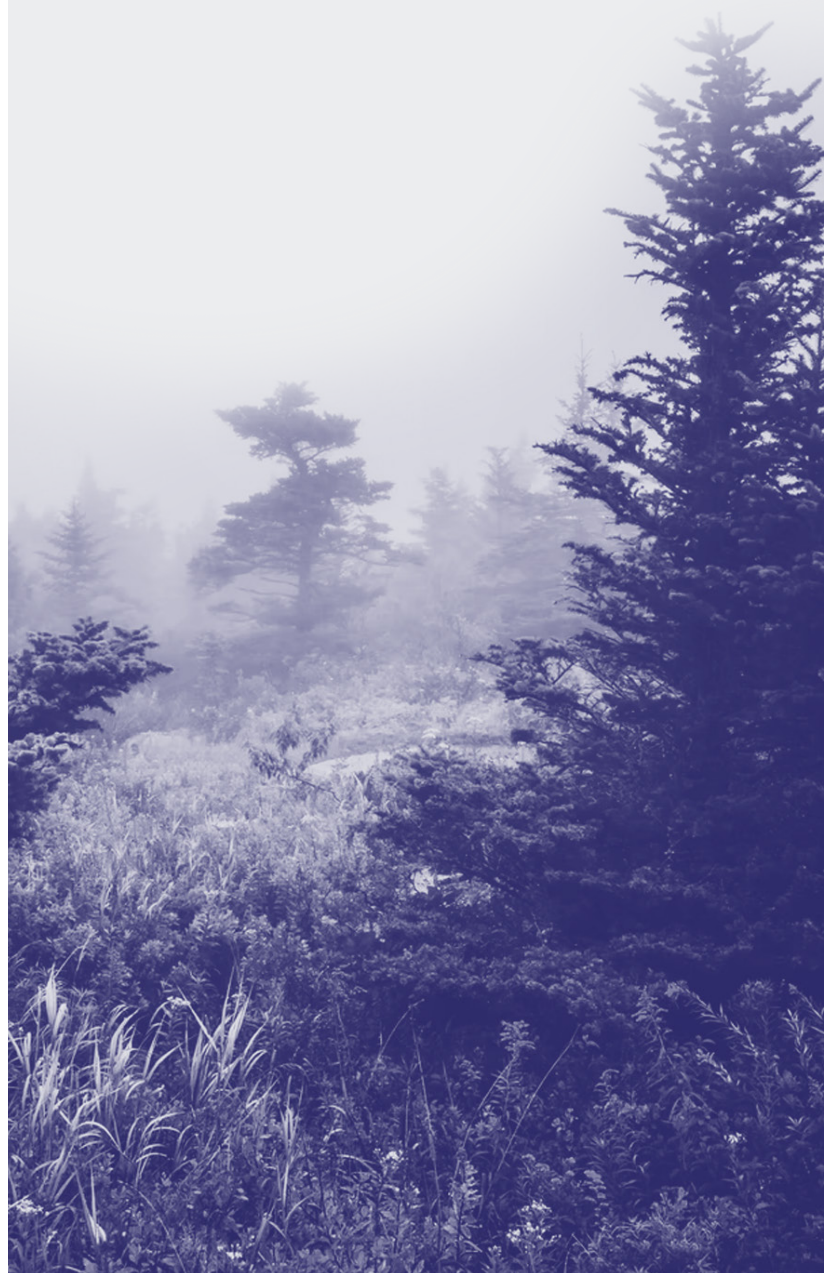
We need to rebuild our ranks of active task force members and volunteers to drive the work of the renewed task force.

Emergent Issues

Accelerating and compounding climate disasters, including unprecedented heat waves and devastating forest fires.

Federal and municipal elections may provide a vital opportunity to enact direly needed climate policies.

The need to recognize the building trades' skills in just transition policies.



Human Services and Poverty Task Force

REPORT

Franco Savoia

The work of the Human Services and Poverty Task Force to eliminate poverty has become more urgent than ever.

The pandemic intensified the struggle of Alberta's families and individuals who are on fixed incomes or working poor to meet their basic needs. The Task Force has grown and strengthened over the past year with membership spanning a greater number of organizations and broader numbers. Members of the task force have engaged in research, education, mobilization and organizing on a number of issues and events, including living wages, child poverty and the federal and municipal elections. As we continue to imagine and build for what our province wants to be after the lessons learned from the COVID pandemic, we must continue to advocate for a radical change in how all our institutions address poverty and address it. The Task Force will continue and build on this work with revitalized energy and organization from this past year, going forward.

Highlights

Participated in the formation of Keep Alberta Strong (KAS), a province-wide initiative to advocate with the new government. As KAS evolved, it became clearer that the work of this Task Force and KAS were similar. After some thoughtful consideration, KAS and the Task Force merged.

The anti-poverty network and the task force bring together many many province-wide initiatives: The Alberta Living Wage Network, the Alberta Poverty Reduction Network, Basic Income Alberta, the Disability Action Network, Social Procurement, \$10-a-day child care campaign and the Vote Housing campaign.

Former Executive Director of Vibrant Communities Calgary, Franco Savoia, has taken the role of Chair of the task force, and our membership has grown to have representation from a diverse intersection of leaders, activists, and community members from more than 12 different organizations.



Human Services & Poverty (continued)

Challenges

UCP Cuts to the most vulnerable Albertans are leaving many without the supports they need.

According to Public Interest Alberta's most recent child poverty report, 164,150 children and their families are living in poverty, or 1 in 6 kids, with single parent families, immigrant families, and Indigenous families being the most vulnerable to poverty.

The provincial government continues to defund and restructure existing programs, causing challenges of access for participants while at the same time, they fail to take a policy and evidence-based approach to developing a poverty elimination framework that takes into account the fundamentals in poverty elimination.

Elected provincial representatives have not demonstrated an interest or regard in poverty-focused organizations with respect to policy development or service delivery, leaving a major disconnect between advocates and decision-makers.

Emergent Issues

The Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society released their report Moving Forward: Charting a Path to Civil Society Recovery in 2020. The overall thrust of the report for going forward is collaboration, all while there have been broad sectoral cuts to social services and children's services.

COVID recovery has emerged as an urgent issue. In Calgary alone, Vibrant Communities Calgary estimates that more than 77,000 people have slipped into poverty throughout the pandemic, and women have been disproportionately impacted with tens of thousands having left the workforce.

Imminent research from the Alberta Living Wage network continues to show that many Albertans earn less than a living wage, necessary for a healthy life of dignity and participation in community; however, it has been a challenge throughout the pandemic to calculate the living wage so we still don't know exactly how many Albertans are facing this dire situation.

Post-Secondary Education Task Force

REPORT

Cole Rockarts

The Post-Secondary Education Task Force represents more than 154,000 undergraduate and graduate students, 11,000 faculty and instructors, and 13,000 support staff in Alberta's post-secondary education system. The Task Force educates post-secondary workers, students and Albertans on the negative impacts of the significant cuts the provincial government has made over the past two years to post-secondary education and pressures politicians to change direction. The Task Force has advocated for mass investment in post-secondary as crucial to pandemic economic recovery, recognizing the critical role our universities, colleges, and polytechnic institutes have in creating strong local economies and preparing our province for the future.



Highlights

Launched a province-wide "Stop PSE Cuts" campaign, which distributed thousands of lawn signs across the province, initiated thousands of digital actions, and gained widespread visibility in earned and social media.

Built a supporters list of thousands of workers, students, and allies to push back against the cuts to post-secondary education

Engaged hundreds of attendees through province-wide day of action car protests and pickets in Calgary and Edmonton

Challenges

Provincial budget cuts resulting in millions less for the operating budgets of universities, colleges, and institutions

Thousands of job losses for support staff across the sector

Engaging workers despite the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and working from home

Emergent Issues

Massive cuts to the public sector outside of post-secondary education

Increasing student-worker solidarity amidst cuts to student supports and tuition increases

Potential job action in the sector in the fall of 2021, resulting in strains on resources to adequately mobilize in support of our Task Force participants' respective memberships.

Seniors' Task Force

REPORT

Terry Price

For decades, research has confirmed what seniors and their advocates have been saying all along: the continuum of seniors' care in this province (and, for the most part, across Canada) places seniors at risk physically, emotionally, and socially.

Now, as COVID-19 has raged for more than eighteen months and thousands of seniors have died in congregate care facilities, the validity of that research, and the concerns of care providers and advocates has been unequivocally substantiated.

We have watched in horror as COVID laid bare the ageism in our society. We witnessed the struggles of overworked and underpaid healthcare aides, nurses and other workers desperately trying to save the lives of seniors without the support of the family members and other volunteers that have been relied upon for decades to fill the gaping holes in our seniors' care services. The callousness of the provincial government became crystal clear as they dithered with millions of federal dollars intended to support the workers in congregate care facilities. It became readily apparent that the lives of seniors were not important and neither were the workers.

Highlights

Discussions of seniors' issues with NDP Members of Parliament, Heather McPherson (AB) and Scott Dewart including pensions, long term care, pharmacare, et al., and NDP MLA's Lori Sigurdson and David Shepherd on seniors' care in Alberta.

Delivering a highly successful webinar on National Standards of Long Term Care/ Congregate Seniors' Care delivered jointly by Friends of Medicare and PIA featuring Pat Armstrong (ON) and Margaret McGregor (BC), moderated by Rebecca DeGraff of the Parkland Institute.

Planning and staging of a ceremony recognizing the National Day of Remembering (WHO) on March 11, 2021 honouring Albertans who have died as a result of COVID 19; in cooperation with United Nurses of Alberta, Friends of Medicare, Alberta Artists and other groups.



Vision Statement:

Develop an integrated and comprehensive public system across the entire continuum of seniors' care ensuring that all seniors have access to dignified and quality care that meets individual health and social needs in their home communities when they need it.

Challenges

Creating and maintaining public awareness of the insidious impacts of privatization in health care generally and seniors' congregate care specifically.

Creating profile for concerns raised in PIA's submission responding to the Facilities-Based Continuing Care review undertaken by the Government of Alberta.

Maintaining momentum for the Alberta Seniors' Deserve Better Campaign. The 500 masks provided to the campaign by UNA are all being worn proudly in Alberta communities.

Emergent Issues

Capitalizing on the momentum being created in the federal election to ensure national standards and federal funding for seniors' care to optimize public ownership and oversight,

Challenging the continued privatization of health care services and the attacks on public health care providers and workers,

Raising awareness of the value of and need for an independent Office of the Seniors' Advocate (AB)

Public Interest Alberta's “Stop Post- Secondary Cuts” Campaign

Public Interest Alberta's **Stop Post-Secondary Cuts campaign** was spearheaded by a coalition of organizations representing over 154,000 students, 11,000 faculty and instructors, and 13,000 support staff across Alberta.



INTERVIEW

One of our steering committee members, Cole Rockarts, is an organizer with the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta (NASA), a key member of the Edmonton organizing committee of the Stop Post-Secondary Education Cuts campaign, and a prolific writer on labour issues. We sat down with them to talk about the impacts of the campaign and Public Interest Alberta's advocacy across the public interest.

► **Public Interest Alberta:** What can you tell us about the pressures facing the post-secondary education sector?

► **Cole Rockarts:** One of the main pressures that the NASA members and largely post-secondary education members are facing are the provincial government's mass cuts – not only in post secondary, but in the entire public sector.

This is especially true for our members; the operating budget of the University of Alberta has been reduced by 25%, over two years. And how this is rolling out for our members is through a lot of cuts, and a lot of job losses and disruptions over the past year and a half. Even pre-COVID, when the provincial budget was released, and the overall operating budget was reduced for the university, we saw 1000 members of our membership at NASA lost. This is nearly 1 in 6 NASA members who have lost their jobs.

This has resulted in major cuts to student supports, anywhere from the 24-hour library spaces that we have on campus no longer being offered, to the outsourcing of all building service workers on the university's campuses, which will ultimately result in privatization. And those jobs are going to private contractors at a lower pay rate, as well as having a lack of union protection for those workers.

► **PIA:** How has Public Interest Alberta's advocacy affected the post-secondary education sector?

► **CR:** PIA's Post-Secondary Education Task Force has been an excellent resource in coordinating our collective response to cuts in the sector. It has enabled us to network with other universities and colleges and post-secondary institutions which has been

Interview (continued)

really valuable. PIA has been useful in petitions to identify our members who are in support of increasing funding and want to take action, as well as broader community support and allies in Alberta that want to see our post secondary-institutions funded properly. The Stop Post-Secondary Campaign could not have run without it or engaged in actions such as delivering over one thousand lawn signs across the province.

► **PIA:** What are some highlights of the “Stop Post-Secondary Cuts” campaign?

► **CR:** I think one of the major highlights for me has been the car protest rallies, I think a lot of folks have been facing issues with trying to do in-person events safely. And I think that that was a really interesting experience for NASA members and AASUA members at the U of A, who really wanted to do a demonstration physically, rather than digitally. After kind of a year of doing a lot of digital advocacy, I think people really wanted to feel connected to other members and wanted to send a message to the government.

One of the other major highlights I would name is seeing what other institutions have done to further post-secondary advocacy. And the ways that different unions in post secondary have worked with student

organizations, as well as larger community groups.

► **PIA:** What do you see as the value of Public Interest Alberta to the public interest?

► **CR:** Hugely valuable! PIA is really necessary in a time like this, where a lot of unions are being faced with a lot of different legislative attacks and cuts to their memberships. And having an organization like PIA, that works not just on one issue in the public sector, but multiple, is a really great resource and avenue for other public sector organizations to come together and coordinate campaigns. And I think this is not only true in post-secondary, but issues such as the current \$10-a-day childcare campaign and just the overall advocacy for seniors that PIA has done historically.

► **PIA:** What are your hopes for PIA in the future?

► **CR:** I would love PIA to have more funding and buy-in. I think the struggle with organizations that are membership-based is doing that coordination and getting people on the same page to move in the same direction. I hope this continues and grows so that more work can be done to work on campaigns that are in the public interest and support public services.



Financial Statement

YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 2021

REVENUE	2021	2020
Membership Fees	313,559	296,330
Donations	4,792	5,417
In-Kind Contributions	553	--
Wage Subsidy	4,118	--
Campaign Income	218,472	10,752
Speaker Honorarium	250	500
Conference Income	--	25,394
Interest Income	449	1,717
	542,193	340,110

OPERATING EXPENSES	2021	2020
Staffing	248,621	250,333
Communications & Outreach	8,000	21,204
Rent	28,034	30,354
Equipment/Software	164	1,076
Telecommunications	3,334	4,368
Office Supplies	373	2,048
Audit Fees	6,930	6,825
Amortization	2,849	3,695
Insurance	2,030	1,998
Bank Charges	903	451
Annual General Meeting	--	814
Board/Executive	198	1,230
Affiliations	245	650
Staff Meetings	--	14
WCB	611	200
Achievements/Service Awards	109	96
Volunteer Food/Parking	--	497
	302,401	325,853

PROGRAM COSTS	2021	2020
Child Care & Early Learning Task Force	624	--
Human Services & Poverty Task Force	10,882	894
Post-Secondary Education Task Force	187,629	--
Seniors' Task Force	454	--
General Advocacy Campaigns	220	20,687
Conference (2020)	1,544	--
Conference (2019)	--	25,176
	201,353	46,757

Total Expenses	503,754	372,610
Surplus/Deficit	38,439	-32,500

Board

Terry Price, President

Gil McGowan, Vice-President
Alberta Federation of Labour

Mike Parker, Vice-President
Health Sciences Association of Alberta

Jonathan Teghtmeyer, Treasurer
Alberta Teachers' Association

Donna Staszewski, Secretary

Alison MacIntosh, Director

Heather Smith, Director
United Nurses of Alberta

Carol Wodak, Director
Seniors' Action and Liaison Team (SALT)

Susan Slade, Director
Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE)

Tristan Turner, Director
Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA)

Scott Crichton, Director
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)
Local 424

Collin Anderson, Director
Alberta Federation of Union Retirees

Greg Mady, Director
Edmonton & District Labour Council

Rory Gill, Director
CUPE Alberta Division

Ex-officio members

Bill Kilgannon, Director
Parkland Institute

Sandra Azocar, Director
Friends of Medicare

Staff

Bradley Lafortune
Executive Director

Laura Kruse
Director of Communications and Organizing

Deanne Timmons
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