

# The Advocate

A PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC INTEREST ALBERTA

**SUMMER  
2017**

## In this Issue

## It's summer in Alberta – and democracy needs your help

**By Larry Booi**

Board President and Democracy Task Force Chair

In terms of advocating for the public interest, it has been a busy and productive year.

Despite its challenging financial situation, Alberta's government has made significant steps forward in a number of important areas, including labour legislation, seniors' care, and perhaps most clearly in aspects of democratic reform that are at the core of the work of Public Interest Alberta's Democracy Task Force.

Last fall's legislation on campaign and party finance reform was particularly welcome, and will have the effect of further limiting the undue influence of wealth in our elections and politics. And the Interim Report of the Alberta Electoral Boundaries Commission (AEBC) recommends significant steps to ensure voter equality and representation by population in our elections.

But there is still significant work to be done in order to ensure more democracy in our political system, and this summer offers an excellent opportunity for Public Interest Alberta's members and supporters to engage in a few small



steps in advocacy that can make a big difference at this pivotal time.

In terms of the positive changes recommended by the AEBC, it would be very helpful if supporters could write to the Commission and make a very brief submission (it can be very informal) supporting the overall directions put forward by the Commission.

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## In Action

See our new website  
[pialberta.org](http://pialberta.org) for:

- Municipal Election Tool Kit
- End Poverty Campaign
- Our Priorities for Change
- Advocacy Updates

## Stay in Touch

**Become a Member**

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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 is a province-wide organization focused on advocacy and education on public interest issues. Founded in 2004, the organization 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.

Executive Director  
Joel French

Office Administrator  
Monica Walker

Communications Officer  
Judith Paquin

### Share Your Thoughts

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

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If you want to receive *The Advocate* online instead, please contact our office.

## Please support our work.

In order to maintain our independence to speak out on the issues that are important to you, we do not accept government or corporate funding. We rely on the financial support of committed individuals and organizations.

As a member of Public Interest Alberta, you will help fund our core operations, enable our dedicated team of staff to sustain our work, and build our capacity to connect with people in communities around Alberta.

## Renew Your Membership Today!

You can renew your membership online at [pialberta.org](http://pialberta.org) or fill out the information below and mail to:

Public Interest Alberta  
Suite 604, 12323 Stony Plain Rd NW  
Edmonton, AB T5N 3Y5

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### DONATE

I would like to make a one-time donation of:

\_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_ Other

# BOLD Advocacy for BIG Changes

## Annual Conference Highlights

Thank you to all volunteers, speakers, moderators, facilitators, note-takers, and participants for making this year's conference a success!

**1 Pre-conference advocacy training session**, featuring Joel French, PIA Executive Director, Jim Gurnett, former MLA, Sandra Azocar and Trevor Zimmerman, Friends of Medicare, and Scott Crichton, IBEW Local 424. The presenters went through our MLA Advocacy Guide and shared their own knowledge and experience in advocating on a wide variety of issues.



**2 Health care - effective advocacy for big changes** with Parkland Institute Research Director Ian Hussey, the Canadian Health Coalition's National Coordinator Adrienne Silnicki, and moderated by Friends of Medicare Executive Director, Sandra Azocar.



**3 Line Perron**, Founder and Director of Early Childhood Development Support Services, who gave an update on child care and early learning in the province and across the country.



**4 Advocacy that makes a difference:** perspectives from elected officials with Edmonton Public School Trustee Michael Janz, Saskatoon City Councillor Hilary Gough, and moderated by former Edmonton City Councillor Michael Phair.

**5 Keynote speaker Erika Shaker**, Director of Education and Outreach at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the editor of *Our Schools / Our Selves*, a quarterly education journal.

**6 The end of news? Media in the age of fake news and alternative facts** with UNA Communications Advisor David Climenhaga, AUPE Communications Officer Mariam Ibrahim, and moderated by Edmonton's Historian Laureate Chris Chang-Yen Phillips.

We appreciate everyone's enthusiasm during all of our panels and workshops. Public Interest Alberta would also like to thank this year's conference sponsors and the conference planning committee who worked for months to make this year's conference as great as it was.

See you at next year's conference on April 5 and 6, 2018, at the Chateau Louis Hotel and Conference Centre in Edmonton.

# Blue Quills teaching the painful truth about residential schools

By Terry Inigo-Jones

HSAA Communications and Seniors Task Force Member

If you want proof that a lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting its shoes on, look no further than residential schools in Canada.

For more than 130 years we've been hearing the lies about these infamous institutions – that they were created to integrate Indigenous Canadians into the mainstream society, that they were intended to offer education to First Nations children. That narrative continues to shape how many people feel about First Nations.

After much more than a century, the truth has a lot of catching up to do. Only now are we beginning to understand what happened, the kidnapping, the torture, the mental abuse, the destruction of families, communities, and cultures.

It was with this in mind that members of the board and senior staff at the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) decided to visit Blue Quills, the former residential school in St. Paul, and talk to people who were sent there and survived. It was an uncomfortable, but important, experience.

Blue Quills opened as a residential school in 1931. In 1970, after a sit-in by Indigenous activists that lasted 17 days and negotiations with Jean Chrétien, then Minister of Indian Affairs, the school was handed over to the Blue Quills Native Education Council. The next year, it opened with a new purpose, aiming to have “children progress in the white man’s education, while continuing to retain their dignity and self-respect as Indian people.” Today, it offers university degrees taught in First Nations languages and training for jobs; it teaches the story of residential schools and engages in intergenerational healing for Indigenous

communities, with a focus on language, culture, and restoring Indigenous identity; and it educates other Canadians about residential schools.

“Some of the stories were really awful – the kinds of things that, if they occurred in a school today, we would be laying criminal charges and putting people in jail for significant periods of time,” says HSAA board member and Edmonton paramedic Kris Moskal. “They talked about having to help bring their siblings to the grave and things like that. Really awful stories.”

Listening to Indigenous people who had actually attended Blue Quills when it was a residential school made the stories powerful. Hearing people recount personal experiences is much more intense than reading about it or hearing it second or third hand.

What they described was “like a concentration camp,” says Moskal. “Very, very tight cramped quarters, massive shared toilet facilities, they were all assigned a number, they weren’t allowed to speak to each other by name. When they call it torture, I think that’s a really reasonable word to use to describe how they broke these people down.”

Fellow HSAA board member Scott Budgell, a public-health inspector from Red Deer, said that before visiting Blue Quills he thought he understood what happened at these institutions.

“My uncle, my mother’s brother, was sent to a residential school so I thought I understood. His time at the school was never spoken of, so I thought I understood. My uncle, on my wife’s side of the family, taught at Blue Quills school so I thought I understood,” he says. “Until I listened to the words and heard the stories, I did not know.”



Scott Budgell



Kris Moskal

He adds, “There were no choices given when the RCMP came and simply stated: ‘Surrender your child or go to jail.’ Children were shipped off to residential school, were separated from their families, had their hair cut off, their clothing removed, and were washed down with kerosene. They were scared and they were alone. They no longer had names, they had become a number.”

Children who required care and protection instead were abused, beaten, and forced to give up their way of life.

Budgell refers to a quote from Duncan Scott Campbell, deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, to sum up the state's appalling attitude towards these children.

"It is readily acknowledged that Indian children lose their natural resistance to illness by habitating so closely in these schools, and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages," Campbell said. "But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is being geared towards the final solution of our Indian problem."

Budgell says: "We knew what was happening and yet we did nothing."

Canada is only now beginning to do something, beginning to talk about residential schools, the effects they had on those who attended, and continue to have on First Nations families and communities.

For those conversations to be successful, they have to be honest, says Moskal.

Without truth, there can be no reconciliation. We have to understand what the residential-school experience did to those who endured it.

"I put myself in that context and imagine what kind of person would I be as an adult if that had been my childhood. ... I struggle to think that I would even be functional after going through a decade or more of that," he says.

The effects of residential schools aren't limited to those who attended – they are passed on to successive generations.

"So many of their second and now third generation out of residential school, they're not even fully aware of what that story was because when their parents came out of the residential schools, they never spoke about it.



Blue Quills school

Photo courtesy of Scott MacDougall

"This wasn't a civilized conversation that you would sit around and have at the dinner table: 'Hey. Remember that time when we were at the residential school and you were so afraid to get up and go to the bathroom, because if they ever caught you in the hallway you'd catch a beating, then you peed your bed and they found out you did and they rubbed your face in it so hard they broke your nose.'"

That was one of the true stories told during the visit to Blue Quills.

One of the areas that Blue Quills now works on is educating Indigenous people about what happened at residential schools and how it shaped, and continues to shape, their family dynamics - why their families seem different from the "norm" you might see on TV.

Much like soldiers returning from war with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) who don't talk about what happened to them, school survivors are often reluctant to talk and they share some of the same coping problems.

Canadians have a moral and ethical responsibility to fix this, says Moskal, even if some people today might claim

they weren't individually responsible for the schools and that it's all history.

The last Canadian residential school didn't close until 1996. Even for the ones that closed earlier, the lingering damage to communities will continue until it is addressed by us as a society. If we continue to do nothing now – about the effect schools continue to have, about the massive inequality between Indigenous Canadians and others, about the lack of clean water in many First Nations communities – we're no better than previous generations who did nothing.

The labour movement can be a leader in this, says Moskal. "There have always been things that the labour movement has said, from a values position, we must pursue. It may initially be unpopular, it may be uncomfortable, we may take heat from all over the political spectrum ... but we were always on the right side of history."

"I would argue this is most certainly one of those times where we will be seen ... to have been on the right side of history, to be pushing publicly at the forefront as much as we can."

For more about Blue Quills:

[www.cbc.ca/2017/canadathestoryofus](http://www.cbc.ca/2017/canadathestoryofus) - How Stanley Redcrow and First Nations activists reclaimed the Blue Quills Residential School

To see a brief videos on residential schools, please visit: [facebook.com/Historica.Canada/videos/10154269437895238](https://facebook.com/Historica.Canada/videos/10154269437895238)

and at: [www.interestingshit.com/culture/canadian-residential-schools](http://www.interestingshit.com/culture/canadian-residential-schools)

# Finally, some progress on seniors' care

By Noel Somerville

Seniors Task Force Chair

The 2017 Alberta Budget produced some encouraging news on seniors' care after the steady decline that has occurred in this province over the past 25 years.

Since the early 1990s, the number of long-term care beds in this province has remained virtually unchanged, despite a 67% increase in Alberta's population and an even larger increase in the percentage of Albertans who are seniors.

That 25-year period also saw a massive reduction in the number of acute care hospital beds, no new auxiliary hospitals, and a steady decline in the availability of home care.

The only significant increase in seniors' care infrastructure over those years has been in the number of supportive living beds, which provide lower levels of care than long-term care facilities and also download many costs onto patients and their families. Many of these supportive living beds have been contracted out by Alberta Health Services to for-profit corporations.

Research studies have shown that the need to generate a return for investors leads to lower staffing levels, less qualified staff, lower hours of care per patient, and a general decline in the quality of care provided compared to that of publicly-operated facilities.

The governing party's election platform included a promise to end the previous governments' experiments with privatization.

That previous direction followed the agenda of corporations, many of them multi-nationals that eyed Alberta seniors as a business opportunity.

The problem is that every dollar returned to shareholders is a dollar not spent on care. A shift away from that direction and toward public ownership in all aspects of our seniors' care system would put the public interest ahead of shareholder profit.

Thus seniors are very encouraged by the recent provincial budget announcement of 345 new public long-term care beds (200 in Calgary and 145 in Edmonton), apparently the first step of a plan to build 1,000 new continuing care beds. The other 655 beds may be the lower level of care – supportive living. We also learned of an additional \$200 million for home care.

These 345 new long-term care beds are a step toward meeting what the government concedes is a deficit of about 4,000 long-term care spaces. Much more will need to be done to meet the significant shortage. The new beds, nonetheless, are the first significant improvement in long-term care we have seen in decades. This is especially true with the government's commitment that the 345 beds will be publicly operated, meaning higher-quality care.

The additional \$200 million for home care, bringing the total annual expenditure on home care to \$2 billion per year, is also very encouraging.

The money comes as Alberta receives new federal funding from a bilateral agreement on health care between the province and the federal government. However, we have been given no indication of how the additional home care funding will be allocated.



The provincial government should use this new funding to follow through on its election commitment to phase in a new model for expanded public home care, rather than expanding its use of private, for-profit corporations to provide home care services to Albertans. That would ensure the money is fully focused on care for Albertans, rather than on profits for corporate shareholders.

Much remains to be done to improve seniors' care in Alberta: expanded pharmaceutical coverage; improved monitoring of residential care; and an end to the downloading of care costs from the government to seniors and their families.

However, the progress made in the recent provincial budget is the most significant we have seen in a long time. Seniors' organizations across Alberta applaud that progress and are doing everything we can to ensure it continues and expands to other areas.

Originally published in the Edmonton Journal, May 18, 2017



# Public Interest Alberta

Advocating for a Better Alberta for All

## 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's Annual General Meeting was held on June 19, 2017.

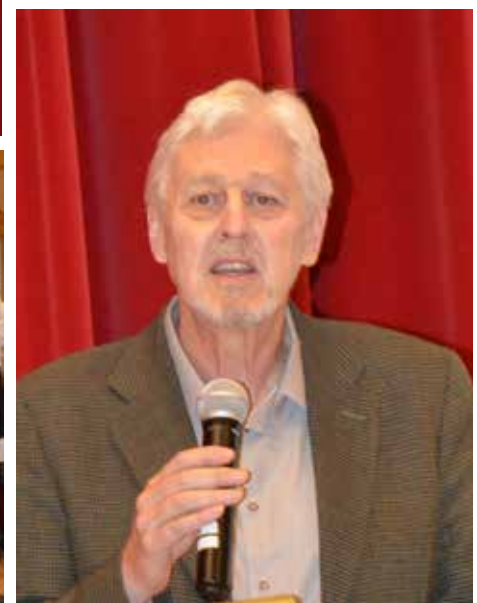
Not only is our AGM an important part of the democratic life of our organization, it also provides a great opportunity for our members to hear about the vital and diverse work that has been carried out by Public Interest Alberta.

Executive Director Joel French and Board President Larry Booi reported on the efforts and achievements of staff and task force volunteers throughout 2016 and 2017.

Jonathan Teghtmeyer, Board Treasurer, reported on the sound financial situation of the organization.

Representatives from each task force – Child Care and Early Learning, Democracy, Education, Environment, Human Services and Poverty, Post-Secondary Education, and Seniors – reported on their comprehensive efforts in creating the Priorities for Change document that will be published in the fall.

Thank you to all who attended.



### Photos

From top right: Public Interest Award winners Cecily Mills and Carolyn Blasetti (SOS), Sandra Azocar of Friends of Medicare, Larry Booi, Jonathan Teghtmeyer cutting his birthday cake, and Joel French



Our 2016 - 2017 Annual Report is available online at [www.pialberta.org/annualreports](http://www.pialberta.org/annualreports) or call our office at 780-420-0471 to obtain a printed version.

Public Interest Alberta  
Annual Report  
2016 - 2017



Each year, the Public Interest Awards are presented to individuals or organizations who are making an exemplary contribution to the public interest in Alberta.

This year's recipients were Cecily Mills for northern Alberta, and Support Our Students (SOS) for southern Alberta.

Cecily's dedication to social justice issues and support of the arts made her an outstanding candidate for the Public Interest Award.

SOS is a dynamo group of three very energetic and knowledgeable women – Carolyn Blasetti, Barbara Silva, and Elsa Campos –who advocate for policy change that supports students in public systems. We thank them for their service to Albertans and the public good!

We would like to thank Alberta Views Magazine, Pages on Kensington, and Audrey's Books for providing gifts for this year's awards recipients.



From left: Larry Booi, Joel French, Cecily Mills, and nominator John Wodak



From right: nominator Mary Dunnigan, Carolyn Blasetti accepting the award on behalf of SOS, Joel French, and Larry Booi

## Democracy needs you

con't from front

In doing so, you will find the following items to be helpful:

- The AEBC website can be accessed at: [abebc.ca/submissions](http://abebc.ca/submissions)
- The PIA website has a number of documents that will be of assistance, including the PIA media release supporting the AEBC's Interim Report, and the initial PIA submission to the AEBC. They can be found at: [pialberta.org/democracy](http://pialberta.org/democracy)

Another important action is to contact your MLA to arrange a meeting over the summer. The months of July and August are the ideal opportunity to make time to sit down with your MLA and let your representative know that you are in favour of the progress that has been made in the area of democratic reform, and you are asking

your MLA to push for further actions in this area. Here are some suggestions for specifics:

- The AEBC recommendations will ultimately go to the legislature for approval, and it is important that your MLA knows that you support the general principles of the report (including voter equality and more support for MLAs in meeting the needs of their constituents.) People may disagree about the details of particular constituency boundaries, but the Commission clearly 'got it right' on the big issues and principles.
- PIA has recommended that the upper limit on political contributions is still too high (\$4000 annually) and should be reduced to \$1500 per year.
- PIA has also proposed a comprehensive reform in the area

of democratic engagement, to ensure that citizens and civil society organizations are systematically engaged in the development of public policy, decision making and governance. We hope that you will let your MLA know that you support these important changes. It would be helpful to make a copy of the proposal to give directly to your MLA. You can find the PIA proposal in the Democracy section of our website.

I hope that your summer is relaxing and rewarding, and at the same time I encourage you to take these small steps as an engaged citizen to advocate with your representative for these much needed improvements to democracy in our province.