

Media release
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New Campaign Mobilizes Public Support for Post-Secondary Education **Poll reveals majority of Albertans oppose cuts and see PSE as a public good**

Public Interest Alberta in partnership with undergraduate students, graduate students, staff unions, and faculty associations from across the province is launching a public advocacy campaign called “Post-Secondary Education is the Answer” to mobilize the public to speak out for greater investments in post-secondary education (PSE).

To help launch the campaign, a poll by Environics was released that shows a very strong majority of Albertans (from 76% to 90%, depending upon the issue) agree that investing in PSE helps resolve many key challenges facing Alberta. The poll also shows that right across the political spectrum, a majority of Albertans (67%) want greater investment in PSE regardless of its current budget challenges, and only 30% would support cuts to PSE.

“Clearly, Albertans understand that investing in post-secondary education helps build stronger, safer, more vibrant communities and a more diversified and healthy economy,” says Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director of Public Interest Alberta. “Given the poll shows strong support for PSE in all political parties, it is clear that Jim Prentice is not hearing the message that further deep cuts to PSE institutions are the wrong path to take.”

The campaign materials includes a two-minute animated video that shows the implications for Alberta’s future if the PC government follows through on its possible 5% – 10% cuts to PSE operating grants. The video shows that Alberta’s PSE system is already struggling with many challenges: having the lowest participation rate in the country while many programs turn away qualified applicants; increases to student fees and debt loads; and cuts to staff, sessional instructors, and faculty which have a serious impact on the quality of education and research at our public institutions.

“The Alberta Students’ Executive Council (ASEC) advocates on behalf of 160,000 students from across the province that the best possible post-secondary education system should be a priority for government given the economic and social benefits for all Albertans,” says Tyler Ludwig, ASEC Chairperson. “As student leaders, we are concerned about the possibility of budget cuts fiscally falling on the backs of students and their families which could limit many Albertans in accessing higher education.”

“The funding cut two years ago resulted in lost opportunities for students and academics as programs were closed, students experienced larger class sizes, and staff were laid off,” said Doug Short, President of the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculty Associations (ACIFA). “If Albertans and the conservative government are serious about diversification and improving our quality of life it will come from well-educated and well-trained individuals. Mr. Prentice, don’t starve the system!”

“For the past several years, front line staff at the U of A and other institutions took the hit when the PC government cut funding to post-secondary education, and this is having a serious impact on programs and the maintenance of PSE institutions,” said Rod Loyola, President of the Non-Academic Staff Association at the U of A. “We can no longer stand back and watch PSE get cut time and again, so we are mobilizing our members and the general public to challenge the funding cuts to PSE in Alberta.”

The “Post-Secondary Education is the Answer” campaign is calling upon prominent Albertans to send us their quotes in support of increased investments in PSE in the lead-up to a possible spring election and provincial budget. The first of these “PSE Champions” is Edmonton’s Mayor Don Iveson, who writes:

“Post-secondary institutions require stable, multi-year program funding, and new operating and capital funding to manage enrollment growth and support skills training in one of Canada's fastest-growing cities. As Alberta's premier university town, Edmonton's six universities employ in excess of 22,000 people with an annual \$1.5 billion payroll. Post-secondary leaders in our city are clear about the need to develop stronger pathways into productive careers for Aboriginal, immigrant and underemployed learners, the help required to apply to and navigate the process for newcomers' permanent residency in Alberta, the assistance needed with settling families and accessing health care, and the help single parents need in order to obtain a post-secondary education.” - Don Iveson, Mayor of Edmonton

Public Interest Alberta’s PSE Task force will be hosting advocacy meetings to build broad public support for the campaign in five cities: Edmonton (Feb. 27), Calgary (March 4), Lethbridge (March 5), Medicine Hat (March 6), and Red Deer (March 9). Details and registrations for these meeting are on the Public Interest Alberta website at www.pialberta.org/PSEmeetings.

Albertans are also being asked to go to the website to send a message to their MLAs, the Premier, and the Minister to tell them why Post-Secondary Education is the Answer. The poll results, background information, two-minute animated video, and quotes from champions can be viewed on Public Interest Alberta’s website at www.pialberta.org/PSEistheAnswer.

The organizations involved in supporting the campaign are:

Alberta Student Executive Council, Graduate Students Associations at the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, Lethbridge and Athabasca, the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations, the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association, CUPE Local 3911 (part time instructors at Athabasca University), the Non-Academic Staff Association (U of A), and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

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