



AUPE's Committee On Political Action Survey

Privatization, including P3s

AUPE members know very well that privatization regularly fails to find “efficiencies” and any cost savings are often off the backs of workers who become de-unionized, with lower pay and benefits.

They also work on the front lines of service delivery and see the problems caused by high-turnover low wage private providers, and the bureaucratic burden caused by having to deal with a third party instead of an in-house provider.

1. Will you oppose privatization of municipal services and infrastructure, including Public-Private-Partnerships aka P3s? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house?

Contracting public services out to a private sector third-party absolutely needs to be the LAST RESORT. P3s are notoriously challenging for major infrastructure projects that often cripple public sector jobs and finances. While I understand the value of cross-sector partnerships having personally worked in the social innovation field that prioritizes forming unlikely partnerships between public, private, and civil society sectors, P3s need tremendous scrutiny and leadership that can negotiate in the interest of the public good.

Municipalities as employers

As our economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, good jobs are an important factor. Public sector workers spend in their communities, and many households impacted by private sector recessions have been able to keep the bills paid thanks to a stable public sector job.

2. Will you support your employees and your community by ensuring the municipality employs staff with living wages, full-time hours where desired, job security, and collective bargaining rights?

I support municipal employees earning a living wage with benefits, job security, and having the ability to organize and negotiate collective agreements, which is a fundamental Charter right that underpins a strong relationship between employers and employees.

The City of Edmonton has had a living wage policy in place for the last few years as part of the EndPovertyEdmonton Roadmap work. However, this living wage policy currently only covers approximately 10% of City staff (those earning under \$17/hour). Recently, as part of the discussions around Reimagine Services to restrain spending, the City is planning to outsource many jobs including the transit custodial workers. This would mean contracting these jobs out through the private sector, which might not guarantee a living wage for these employees (which they currently have at the City) or pension and benefits. Most of these workers come from racialized communities, who will likely also be apprehensive about working conditions for them and their families if services are moved to a private contractor. I supported Amalgamated Transit Union's campaign to protect these jobs. In fact, we need to ensure protections for all City workers and that the living wage policy is equitably implemented.

3. Will you oppose attempts from the provincial government to legislate against municipal staff including cuts to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, or restrictions on their right to strike?

Absolutely. See response for #2. Living wage, job security with benefits are not only a labour issue but also a poverty issue. Cutting pensions for people who spent years in public service is undermining and affects their wellbeing. Restricting workers' ability to organize and to bargain challenges their fundamental Charter rights.

Funding

For decades the trend on public services has been cuts and defunding, with fees downloaded onto workers, and the tax burden shifted away from the wealthy and corporations to the working class. At the same time, workers in the public sector know that tax freezes and cuts mean cuts to services and jobs. Any promise political candidates make can only be realized through proper revenues.

4. How do you propose your municipality deal with funding shortfalls, cuts, and downloading of responsibilities from federal and provincial governments? Do you favour spending cuts over tax increases?

I think that the City needs to collaborate with the federal and provincial governments to rethink spending structures and diversify the available income streams for cities. There are collaborative and creative ways for the city to provide services and meet their responsibilities with little to no tax increases including the potential for regional service models.

Until those streams of funding are available, I believe there are ways to balance spending cuts and tax increases to minimize their impacts on Edmontonians.

COVID-19 Safety

With the negligent provincial response to now three preventable waves of COVID-19, municipalities have been put in an awkward position of needing to take measures to protect their citizens throughout the pandemic. Many are introducing measures of their own, but not all have.

5. Do you support measures such as mask mandates, vaccine “passports”, and vaccine mandates for staff to limit and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your municipality?

I am a public health professional—I moved to Edmonton to pursue postgraduate studies in this field, and I apply a public health lens to all of my professional endeavors. The current situation in Alberta is unacceptable and Edmonton’s City Council has an integral role to play in helping this city through the ongoing pandemic. I completely support the measures that are widely recommended by our healthcare professionals including mask and vaccine mandates, and passports. I will continue to listen to the science as it develops and will adjust my support based on the latest information so that we can protect all Edmontonians against COVID-19, so that our lives can slowly adapt and return to normal, however that may look post-COVID.

Affordability

With workers squeezed by increasing costs, municipal fees add to the burden. Service fees are a form of flat tax that require the same payment from a CEO as a low income worker.

Transit affordability is an important piece of working class equity. Fees add an extra burden for many people who can not afford the costs of private transportation in the first place. The reduced emissions on increasing transit ridership can also be a part of how cities take positive action on climate change.

6. Do you support measures to reduce municipal reliance on services fees and fares, such as eliminating transit fares?

I support measures to diversify the sources of income that the City draws from—our current reliance on taxes and service fees is simply unsustainable. I think it will be critical for the new City Council to prioritize rebuilding the relationship with the provincial government and revisit the Big City Charters to allow for more permissive funding generation strategies. I would like to see Edmonton implement priority-based budgeting through the lens of existing strategic plans (e.g., the City Plan), and regional cost sharing models that benefit all of the municipalities in the Greater Edmonton Area.