

# Council bus stuck in the mud



ROSS  
PRUSAKOWSKI

“Given the ease with which the principles breezed through Council, it’s hard not to lay all the blame for the dubious question at the feet of the entire body—especially after having watched them spend nearly an hour last year debating the exact size in milliliters of a pint.”

While there are still five months left before we will truly know if Council learned from their mistakes last time they drafted a U-Pass question, the early signs are discouraging. At the last meeting, our elected representative chose to make haste with one of the most important—and expensive—questions ever to face students, and did the rest of us a great disservice. Council took just over two and a half hours to debate a motion on the principles that will form the basis of the new U-Pass question, a motion which, because it was a late addition to the agenda, most councillors were seeing for the first time.

This is a shocking departure for a body that was so concerned about carrying out their fiduciary duty last year that they rejected questions, spent hours debating the fine print and didn’t hesitate to table questions while councillors collected their thoughts. If last year’s edition of Council had not exercised that caution, students could today be funding a questionable physical activities complex or watching the SU flounder under red ink from \$2 pints of beer.

As approved by Council, the principles that will form the basis of the question are clouded in uncertainty.

It will also be a major departure from the question students voted on in 2003/04, in that there’s no provision to exempt students living outside the service area from paying for the U-Pass, meaning that people residing in places beyond the collective transit systems’ reach will still have to pay for a U-pass they can’t use.

Given the ease with which the principles breezed through Council, it’s hard not to lay all the blame for the dubious question at the feet of the entire body—especially after having watched them spend nearly an hour last year debating the exact size in milliliters of a pint. Yet councillors shouldn’t shoulder the bulk of the blame. Instead, SU President Samantha Power and Vice President (External) Cournoyer should both bear plenty of responsibility for the poor principles presented to Council.

Not only did Power and Cournoyer spring the question upon councillors with little warning, but they also created a false sense of urgency, threatening them with the supposedly short time frame they had left to approve the principles (a threat they backed up by referencing the three-week break in Council’s meeting schedule and the fact that the Bylaw Committee that will be tasked with

drafting the question based on the principles approved by Council was extremely inexperienced).

What they forgot to mention to the mostly first-time councillors is that Council has until 8 February to approve the second reading of a question and can call for additional Council meetings above and beyond those set out at the beginning of the year. Add in the fact that Council has the power to compel a committee to report items to it by a certain date and plenty of time existed for Council to receive presentations from the three transit authorities, the University and the SU’s advocacy department itself so it could conduct a proper and well-informed debate.

It seems like it’s too much to expect the President and VPX to provide Council with this information when they’re debating a question that could collectively cost students more than \$4.5 million a year. Regardless, at this point it seems that the best students can hope for is that these convoluted principles never make it onto the final ballot, but rather become a starting point for an ironclad referendum where students can vote on the merits of the U-Pass alone, and not those of the question’s wording.

## Much hot air emitted in carbon tax debate

Done properly, industry should be able to cope with emission restrictions



PATRICK  
ROSS

campaign—remarked, “The first sentence he said is, ‘We need to protect Alberta.’ And in the second sentence he said ‘carbon tax.’”

The federal Conservative Party, on the other hand, has announced plans to make strict California-style emissions standards mandatory for automobile manufacturers in Canada. An agreement with automakers is currently in place; these standards are voluntary, however. The Conservatives’ plan would take effect in 2010, when the current agreement expires.

**The ridiculous squabbling can ultimately be reduced to a single point: fossil fuels don’t become carbon emissions until they are actually burned.**

Buzz Hargrove, president of the union of Canadian Auto Workers, has his share of complaints about this plan. He claims that it would be catastrophic for the Canadian automobile industry. Yet supporters of the tax who acknowledge that it could ruin Western Canada’s energy-based economy insist that that should be permitted nonetheless. Perhaps it should be equally okay to implement a plan that could harm the car-manufacturing industry, which, like the energy industry in the West, makes up a significant portion of Eastern Canada’s economy.

The ridiculous squabbling can ultimately be reduced to a single point:

fossil fuels don’t become carbon emissions until they are actually burned. A carbon tax may seem like a novel idea—especially to those who are hostile to the oil industry. However, regulating emissions at their actual source—where the fuels in question are consumed, then spewed into the air as carbon dioxide—makes a lot more sense, and will have a very real and measurable effect on carbon emissions. Yet one must still recognize that the fuels themselves are a necessary component to this process. Perhaps both components should be addressed.

It certainly couldn’t hurt to create actual incentives for Canadian industry to reduce their consumption of hydrocarbons and, by extension, their carbon emissions. A carbon tax could have precisely that effect using a revenue-neutral model under which taxes collected are returned to the industries that paid them, depending on each particular company’s success in reducing emissions. Then this model must actually be followed. Unfortunately, past experiences with the expected disbursement of such tax revenues—for example, gasoline taxes—don’t quite inspire confidence to this end.

Climate change is too critical an issue to allow it to be embroiled in petty bickering between the East and the West. This could be the perfect issue on which to reach a compromise. Perhaps Western leaders should strike a bargain with their Eastern counterparts: let them have their carbon tax, so long as it’s accompanied by the plan for California emissions standards. Taken together, the two proposals could become a bi-partisan plan for decisive action, and actually help stem the imminently catastrophic tide of climate change.

No one needs a memo from Greenpeace these days to realize that environmental issues currently occupy a central position in the public agenda. Liberal leadership candidate Michael Ignatieff knows this as well as anyone. Ignatieff has seized upon the imaginations of supporters and opponents alike with his proposed solution to climate change: curtailing greenhouse gases through the application of a carbon tax.

According to the Global Policy Forum, carbon taxes are designed to correct the free market’s failure to account for the external costs that the consumption of fossil fuels places on society in terms of environmental damage. Ignatieff’s plan is designed to address these externalities by encouraging individuals and industries to use lower-carbon fuels.

His plan has drawn comparisons to Pierre Trudeau’s infamous National Energy Program, which to this day remains a point of contention between the Federal Liberals and Alberta. Ignatieff, for his part, insists that he would take steps to protect Alberta from the economic effects (some even suggest economic ruin) that a carbon tax could inflict. But even Ignatieff’s fellow Liberals have raised concerns. Stéphane Dion—who, it should be noted, is a former federal environment minister and one of Ignatieff’s opponents in the ongoing Liberal leadership



### OUR WEEKLY LINEUP

#### Mini Burger Mondays:

Cure that case of the “Mondays” with 99¢ mini burgers and \$10 jugs. House Rules Apply. 7pm to close

#### Karaoke Tuesdays:

Downstairs in the LIBRARY. Like Canadian Idol, only our \$8.99 nachos are cheesier than Ben Mulroney. 7pm to close

#### Wing Wednesdays:

Get in V-formation and migrate to the land o’ 25¢ wings. House Rules Apply 7pm to close

#### Loonie Thursdays:

\$1 Draught downstairs in the LIBRARY. Celebrate the invention of the loonie. 7pm to close

#### Finally Fridays: Extended Happy Hour.

“True North strong and nearly free” 3pm to 9pm

#### S.O.S. Saturdays:

\$2 Highballs downstairs in the LIBRARY. Your wallet is sending out an S.O.S. – Save On Spirits. 9pm to midnight

#### Music Trivia Sundays:

Test your music IQ. No studying required. \$15 Buckets of Domestic beer! 7pm to close

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