



ELECTION DISSECTION

Taking a scalpel to the thick rhetoric of student government

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U-Pass Referendum

While there's nobody running the No side of this campaign, Kirkham felt it was important that students understand for what exactly they are voting. Though we're unanimous that student should vote an "informed and philosophically considered Yes," students should understand the impact of voting Yes over voting No. Students outside of the three municipalities must still pay for the pass, regardless of their ability to use the service. Park-and-ride is an option in some areas but not in others. Students who chose to pay more rent to live close to the University must still pay, and parking rates are slated to increase to compensate for the money the University is setting aside for the U-Pass. It's also possible that most of those driving to campus will continue to do so, as faculty and staff create the bulk of traffic—the U-Pass won't impact this.

Fundamentally, this is a question of how students want to redistribute their money. And for most students, the pass will be a huge gain. It's true that Edmonton is a low-density city, which may mean that transit access isn't ideal, and that those who drive must drive, due to limits of transit system. But as Lettner points out, we need to look at what we want Edmonton to be five or ten years down the line.

Despite these reservations, for most students this pass will be of great benefit. The change that will come to Edmonton through a universal bus pass is progressive and positive—it will be a boon for most students right now, and also increase pressure on the City to improve our lacklustre transit system. Finally, it's important that we look past self interest and toward something that will benefit the bulk of students, as well as the environment in general.

The Verdict: An Informed Yes

Yes: 5 (Barer, Butz, Lettner, Taylor, Prusakowski); No: 2 (Jones, Kirkham)

Coca-Cola Plebiscite

"I'm voting Coke No because if someone comes up to me and says, 'You get money for scholarships, and the SU gets \$50 000 a year, and that does great stuff, and it doesn't really matter anyway,' it's not a very convincing argument," Lettner says.

"Obviously Coke is making a profit off of us, because ... they're trying to grow the whole next generation of Coke drinkers. So it's not a trivial choice: it actually means something, and you're buying in to selling out right from the get-go," he adds.

The general sentiment around the table seems to be that, though the contract might yield short-term gains, small steps in the right direction can actually make a difference in end. Unfortunately, pre-campaigning rules have stifled the ability for students to enter into critical debate about the Coke question.

"We haven't been able to get at the fundamental issues about why students should be voting No," Kirkham says, pointing to the \$900 fine received by the No side. "[It has] deprived students of the ability to make an informed choice and has hidden the real issue."

Still, compelling reasons exist for voting No. "The ethical issues aside, for which I don't think the evidence is compelling enough, why should we subject ourselves to a monopoly? Why would we subject ourselves to hyper-corporatization?" Prusakowski asks.

"For me, the ethical arguments are the ones that are persuasive," Butz counters, suggesting that we have enough to go on to indict them as a corporation. And for students on campus, boycotting Coke products is really not an option. No matter how strong our convictions are, sometimes we just need to say, "Fuck it, I need an orange juice."

Jones, meanwhile, takes a more Machiavellian approach. "I have no problems with selling out, but not at this price:

With an eye to wading through the pounds of feces thrown about during Students' Union elections each year, and perhaps extracting something of substance from the vague promises and platitudes, the *Gateway* compiled a crack team of SU election gurus; they'll be your guides, if you will, through the shit-storm that is SU elections.

The panel was comprised of Steve Kirkham (former SU councillor, campaign manager and creator of Bear Scat), Chris Jones (long-time SU observer, two-time executive candidate and Health Plan No campaign manager), Duncan Taylor (former vice-president (student life) and then councillor), Graham Lettner (former Engineering councillor and former SU president), Rob Butz (former APIRG board member and candidates' graphic designer), Ariana Barer (former campaign manager, former associate VP (external) and CJSR news producer), and Ross Prusakowski (long-time SU observer and *Gateway* writer). Each spent the past week taking in the fora and candidate "literature," laughing at the bright eyes of Ursa Minor while crying every time someone mentioned the Powerplant.

Surprisingly, despite our group's diverse (at least in terms of experience) background, we reached near-consensus on almost every issue. We also noticed some disturbing trends in both candidate demographics and student involvement.

First, there's a depressing lack of female candidates, or diversity in general, in this year's election. It seems obvious to state that there's a problem with the amount of women involved in politics, and the SU (along with this panel) is no exception. Second, SU elections are the only time where there is real dialogue between the SU and regular students, and yet general involvement seems to be on the decrease, while student apathy is on the rise. This may be partly due to the fact that it gets harder and harder to live and go to school every year, which means less people running, and in turn students have less of an ability to voice their concerns.

With that said, read on to find out how we thought each candidate fared and whether they're worthy of your vote, as well as our take on the U-Pass and Coke questions. Keep in mind, though, that these statements are inevitably clouded by our collective experience, so our recommendations are no substitute for becoming informed on the issues at stake. Above all, take our comments with the appropriate grain of salt.

it's far too low," he says.

But to Taylor, the problem with voting No is that it means we lose our place at the bargaining table, as well as damage accessibility for those who need it most.

As he points out we need to look at how this principled stance is impacting access to education. Any loss in Students' Union funding has the potential to affect advocacy, student life and the quality of our services.

"The per-student amount is irrelevant: what matters is what the total figure represents. I have no problem with the SU taking a principled stance ... the problem is, at this point, a principled stance would impact accessibility to education, which in the end is the primary goal of the SU," Taylor says.

Instead, Taylor suggests, we use our collective buying power to effect change. Having the contract gives us leverage, whereas saying No writes us out of the picture.

Butz, however, sees this plebiscite question as part of something larger. "Some people who are super-libertarian or free-enterprise think we shouldn't have a monopoly. Other people are more concerned about human rights, but all these issues converge, and I think that's where we have a political moment where we have to make a decision on something," he says.

The problem here is that students who support No do so for a plethora of different, equally good reasons, and this will make it difficult for the SU to chart a path that's consistent with what students may want. For some who are specifically anti-Coke, another exclusivity contract might not be a big deal, whereas for others it's crucial that the SU distance itself from any potential monopolies whatsoever.

As Jones concludes: there are many compelling reasons to vote No, and few to vote Yes.

The Verdict: Majority Rules

Yes: 1 (Taylor); No: 6 (Jones, Kirkham, Barer, Prusakowski, Lettner, Butz)