

# Mason kicks off campaign on campus

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Provincial NDP Opposition Leader Brian Mason was on campus last Thursday to launch his party's fall pre-election campaign. Mason said he expects an election to be held in November, and will be spending the next two months touring the province. After meeting with the Students' Union executive, Mason stopped by the Gateway office to answer some questions.

**Why did you choose to include a stop at the University of Alberta on the first day of your provincial tour?**

"First of all, education is a primary concern to us—we always have made it a priority. The second reason is the housing situation. This is a serious problem [that affects] people right across the province, but it particularly affects students at this time looking for a place to live. And the third reason has to do with the environment. Youth, as represented in the University, are the people who are going to have to live in the world that we are messing up right now. We have a major policy proposal around a green future for the province of Alberta, and we think that this is a good place to talk about that."

**Students are notorious for their low voter turnout. What can be done to combat this?**

"I think that sometimes politics is seen as remote and not really influencing people's lives, and I know that the anti-globalization movement has sometimes fallen into the trap of saying that politics doesn't matter anymore because all the decisions are made globally by large corporations and the structures that are set up under free trade and so on. But I don't think that's correct. The decisions that are being made by the provincial government today will have a profound impact on the lives of young people and we all need to work to raise the awareness of that fact."

**There's currently a critical shortage of affordable housing in the province, and this has a direct impact on students. What solutions do you propose for this problem?**

"We proposed a year ago that the province establish a ministry of housing responsible for coordination of all aspects of policy relating to housing, and we think that there needs to be funding for emergency housing.

The second thing is a housing program of a broader nature so that we ensure that there are different types of housing and that the housing supply is managed so that rents can stay affordable.

It's really a question of matching the supply to meet the demand. Things like non-profit housing, cooperative housing, municipal housing, residences for universities, and so on are all part of that, and we just met with some of [the] people from your Students' Union Executive, [and] they talked about a proposal that they had made in conjunction with the University and the Graduate Students' Associations for 2000 units of student housing,



MIKE OTTO

**LIFE OF BRIAN** The NDP's leader came by the U of A campus to talk PSE.

and we're certainly supportive of that.

The third thing is that we believe the province should get back in the business of land banking and assembling land which can be turned over to municipalities so that there is a ready supply of land for new housing subdivisions. This will assist with the single-family housing market and make sure that municipalities are in a position to bring on enough single-family homes to meet the demand.

The fourth thing is the whole question of rent regulation. We would bring in a temporary program to set guidelines on how much landlords can increase the rent and [the maximum] would be the Consumer Price Index for the previous year plus two per cent. That would not apply to new housing construction or new apartment construction, because we don't want to inhibit decisions by builders to build new housing, but it would apply to existing rental accommodation. And would be in place until balance is restored in the housing market."

**The University of Alberta has begun to promote green initiatives on campus. What do you think should be done to ensure that postsecondary institutions uphold environmentally friendly practices?**

"One of the things that we're talking about in our tour is our green energy plan. It's a plan to secure additional funding by getting a fair share for our royalty revenue on our oil and gas and using that money to build a large fund over a period of ten years that would be used to finance green energy initiatives."

**What do you consider more effective: universal programs such as tuition freezes, or need-based funding for things like grants—and why?**

"Well I'm not sure it's an either/or situation. But I do know that tuition fees are far too high in this province. They should be based

on what a typical student might be able to earn in the summer. Tuition needs to be a manageable amount that students can afford, but it's only one of their costs. Often their biggest cost is housing, and then there is food and transportation, and there is entertainment and all of those things are important to ensuring that students can afford to come to university or go to college or technical institutions.

The important thing is that the debt that students incur to go to university is not a disincentive to them actually attending. Because if it is—and I think it is—then you're going to have students from high-income backgrounds over-represented at universities and students from low-income backgrounds under-represented. And that's exactly the situation we now have."

**How do you plan to take advantage of the recent dips in the Progressive Conservative's ratings?**

"What we want to do is get our ideas before Albertans and engage in conversations with Albertans and show them what we offer. We believe that they'll be responsive. For example, both the [PC] and the Liberal parties take a lot of money from big oil companies and other corporations, and this affects their policies—this affects what they stand for—and it comes down to [a] choice of doing something in the interest of middle-class families, or students, or seniors on the one hand, or a big oil company on the other hand. Who will they choose? They're conflicted because of their source of campaign funds, so what's important for us is to get the message out that Alberta's NDP is on people's side. We're on your side. And the other political parties are not; they cannot be because of where they choose to raise their campaign money."

**You have five minutes to write a haiku on why the NDP is the right party in Alberta for students to support.**

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Please vote NDP

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