

PIA urges gov't to up funding for postsecondary in 2008

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Senior News Editor

On Monday, Public Interest Alberta (PIA) rang in the first day of classes by holding a media conference at the University of Alberta to draw attention to the state of postsecondary education in the province.

PIA's Task Force on Postsecondary Education focused on the problems currently facing students in the province and stressed the need for a comprehensive plan to address these issues.

"This campaign is here to challenge the government and all parties to see what is missing and what will be missing if we do not take action now," said PIA Executive Director Bill Moore-Kilgannon.

So far no official provincial election call has been made; however, Moore-Kilgannon said it will be coming shortly, adding that PIA plans to ensure postsecondary education is "a fundamental part of that [election] debate."

"The election call will come February 4th or 5th, right after the speech from the throne, and we expect all political parties to have a very clear and dynamic plan for postsecondary education as part of that," he said.

U of A Students' Union Vice-President (External) Steven Dollansky, who focused on financial aid issues during the media conference, added that PIA's efforts "mesh quite nicely"

with those of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS).

"As much as we can work together and as many different avenues we can use to make the public debate about postsecondary education, the better off we're going to be," Dollansky said.

NAIT Student Association Vice-President (Academic) Lisi Monro was also on hand to draw attention to the fact that the trades are being equally affected by a lack of PSE funding.

"Simply put, there are more qualified students in this province than there are spaces," Monro said. "When you want to talk about infrastructure in Alberta's economy, go up the road to NAIT [...]. We're operating at 200 per cent capacity."

Moore-Kilgannon said that PIA's campaign message will be taken province-wide, and added that the advocacy group will be working hard to send information to rural areas.

"These issues are relevant just as much in Lacombe as they are in downtown Calgary," Dollansky said.

Alberta's two opposition parties were also quick to add their voice to the debate. NPDP MLA (Edmonton-Strathcona) Raj Pannu, whose portfolio includes advanced education and technology, noted that the press conference was "very timely."

"Time is now for the public to engage this government in a serious debate over the chronic problem of

underfunding in postsecondary education," Pannu said, highlighting the pressures put on students by rising tuition fees and housing costs.

"The Tories are playing catch-up on funding for postsecondary institutions thanks to their penny-pinching ways during the Klein era," Maurice Tougas, Liberal shadow minister for Advanced Education and Technology, said via email. Tougas further explained that the Alberta Liberal plan for additional funding for postsecondaries "goes beyond the government's Access to the Future fund."

"As for the Ralph Klein promise of the lowest tuition rates in the country, I can safely say the Tories have given up on that boast. I asked the current Premier, during Question Period, to confirm the Klein commitment, and he refused to answer directly, which is Tory-speak for 'no,'" Tougas said.

But while the parties developed their separate solutions for the problems facing postsecondary education in the province, Moore-Kilgannon said that average Albertans aren't necessarily as disconnected from the political process as some might believe.

"I think the whole question of apathy is overstated sometimes," he said. "When people begin to understand the connection between their quality of life and their quality of postsecondary education and politics, that's when people get active."

Options still available to avoid legal action

THREAT • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

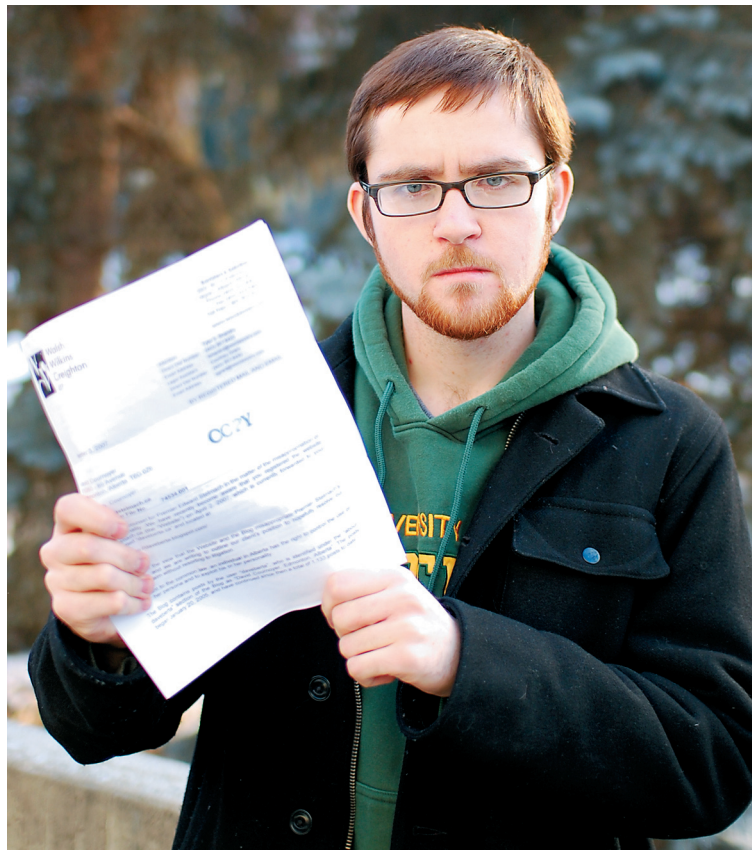
However, Jim Campbell, Executive Director of PC Alberta, said that while the deadline has passed and no legal action has taken place, Cournoyer can still comply with the letter to avoid a legal battle.

"As I understand it, the letter provides Mr Cournoyer a number of options to avoid litigation," Campbell explained. "Those options are still open to him, but I'm not going to discuss the Premier's legal strategy."

While he was somewhat surprised by the whole ordeal, Cournoyer said he would be seeking his own legal counsel to see what his options are.

"I think this thing is pretty bizarre and pretty ridiculous, but I am taking it seriously," he said. "It's a pretty threatening letter."

"Instead of offering to buy the domain name from me, which would have been the more proper thing to do, Honest Ed's first reaction was to hire a high-priced Calgary lawyer to go after a 24-year-old university student."



DON'T SUE ME, BRO! Cournoyer shows off the cease and desist letter.

The Gateway will continue to follow this story as it develops.

Volunteers looking for clarity on Richel situation

CJSR • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"What it basically comes down to is the FACRA Board of Directors is the democratically elected board in charge of managing the station's affairs, and this is one of those affairs," Elliott explained. "This hiring process we're talking about—it's confidential. We're able to talk about it with any of the candidates or their representatives. We can't talk about it with the media."

Nevertheless, Richel remains

unconvinced that clarity surrounding his termination exists.

"People have been asking the board, 'Show us the policies that he violated,' and the response from the board so far has only been, 'we consulted a lawyer,'" Richel said.

However, after 23 years of involvement with the campus radio station, Richel says he would still like to be a part of CJSR in the future.

"I'd like to come back. It's not the

centre of my life, but it's an important part of my life," he said.

Richel added that he is "confused at this stage," but that he doesn't blame any one person for the ambiguity he feels has surrounded the recent events.

"I know the people on the board, and I think they are doing the best job they possibly can under the circumstances, but I think they might be following policies and processes to a fault."

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