



OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

POST ELECTIONS 2020 PROVINCIAL LOBBYING STRATEGIC PLAN

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

With the end of the provincial elections on October 24th, 2020, the AMS will be continuing its lobbying efforts specifically on the issues of BC's recovery from COVID-19 (codified as ad-hoc advocacy), climate change, student financial aid, operational funding, sexual violence prevention, student unemployment, and food insecurity. These issues are some of the many issues that were continuously highlighted in the provincial election especially with regards to young people and by extension, students. Additionally, and as of November 26th, 2020, the mandates for the BC government's cabinet were also released as follow-up documents to the NDP's campaign promises. In understanding that students are one of the hardest-hit demographics of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe it is pivotal to ensure that the provincial government hears the voices of students and that student-centric policymaking along with budgetary allocations are enacted.

1.2 LEGISLATIVE COMPOSITION

- **British Columbian New Democratic Party: 55 (+14) Seats**
- **British Columbian Liberals: 29 (-12) Seats**
- **British Columbian Green Party: 3 (+0) Seats**
- **Vancouver-Point Grey: NDP (David Eby)**
- **Legislative Result: NDP Majority Government**

2.1 HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing became a popular talking point among candidates during the 2020 provincial elections. In understanding that the majority of British Columbians are experiencing financial difficulty with regards to record-high unemployment and the phasing out of federal programs such as the CERB and CESB, candidates recognized the importance of stressing housing affordability. In acknowledging the legislative make-up as described in point 1.2, the NDP had distinctly provided a comprehensive list of promises with regards to housing affordability. Key examples of these commitments are as follows:

- Rent freeze to the end of 2021 and capping increases after that to exclusively inflation and not the previously established formula of 2%+inflation ¹.
- Providing a renter's rebate: an income-tested renter's rebate of \$400 a year for households earning up to \$80,000 annually that are not already receiving other rental support ^{2 3}.
- Continuing to deliver a steady supply of new affordable homes with a stress on co-op housing through the Homes for BC Plan ⁴.
- Providing more homes for Indigenous people in BC: a budgetary commitment of \$550 million towards building 1,750 new homes ⁵.

- Getting more affordable housing built through Housing Hub partnerships: expanding the role of innovation to partner with non-profit and co-op housing providers to acquire and preserve existing rental housing ^{6 7}.

In taking these commitments into account with regards to the advocacy opportunities that the AMS will be pursuing, we can understand that the provincial government was receptive to several submissions made concerning the lack of rental support for student's with regards to housing. In addition, the provincial government will also be receptive to the co-op housing opportunities that the AMS intends to pursue. In accordance with the above-mentioned promises, we will be advocating for a rent freeze for the month of December 2020 till the end of 2021.

2.2 ACTION ITEMS

- Advocate for the inclusion of student housing in all further rental support programs released by the province for the rest of the COVID-19 pandemic. This inclusion must be notwithstanding constraints placed by the Residential Tenancy Act or federal income support programs.
- Push for a rent freeze for the entire year of 2021 to ensure that British Columbians and by extension, students, are being well-supported during these financially stressful times.
- Support the establishment of homes for Indigenous students on and off reserve lands ⁸.
- Work with the Student Services Manager to lobby for the fulfilling of commitments surrounding co-op housing so that the AMS along with other student unions may pursue own co-op housing opportunities. These opportunities would, in a long-term manner, combat the lack of affordable housing.
- Working with the provincially mandated student housing working group to produce leading practices to ensure that student housing providers are delegating tenancy rights upon student renters.

2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

- **Rec. 1:** Make certain that the income-tested renter's rebate is inclusive of student housing and does not enforce eligibility criteria that is unattainable by the majority of post-secondary students to ensure that student-related housing is being supported throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Rec. 2:** Establish a rent freeze in 2021 to ensure that British Columbians and by extension, students, are not being subject to rent increases during a time when students are facing high unemployment rates, lack of government support programs, and regularly scheduled tuition increases.

- **Rec. 2-1:** Make certain that the provincial government follows through with its commitment to cap rent increases at inflation as opposed to its preceding policy of 2%+inflation.
- **Rec. 3:** Provide increased funding of \$150 million towards affordable housing specific to Indigenous students and at-risk Indigenous people along with ensuring that the provincial government is putting pressure on the federal government to do its part in delivering affordable housing to reserve lands.
- **Rec. 5:** Establish an enforceability function in the Student Housing Working Group and by extension, the Leading Practices Subcommittee which currently has no enforceability measures in place. In the event that the establishment of such measures is not possible, work with student unions and student housing providers into the creation of student housing legislation.

3.1 COVID-19 RECOVERY

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges, not only in its climax; however, it has also presented challenges with regards to BC's economic recovery. In June, unemployment records were at an all-time high and this was due to the easing of restrictions placed by the minority provincial government ⁹. In contrast to May, September's unemployment statistics show that employment is making a return. As cited by the Labour Force Survey of September 2020, employment increased by an average of 5.8% among the youth age group (15 to 24) from its June unemployment-counter of 29.1% ¹⁰. Additionally, with the end of the federal CESB and CERB programs, students are in need of further provincial and federal support programs. While the EI and CRB program are projected to replace the defunct CERB and CESB, they will not provide relief to the majority of students due to their requirements on insurable work hours. As a result, the NDP platform allows us to see several financial aid options. These platform points have been further solidified in the recently published mandate letters. The AMS will continue to push for additional financial aid options that we intend to lobby the province to push through the legislature. These financial aid commitments are as follows:

- One-time \$1,000 direct deposit to families whose household income is under \$125,000 annually – with a sliding scale up to \$175,000 ¹¹.
- One-time \$500 direct deposit to single people earning less than \$62,000 annually – with a sliding scale up to \$87,000 ¹².
- Increasing food security for people in need: increasing supports to food banks and developing program partnerships with grocery stores and not-for-profits.
- The expansion of the newly-established BC Access Grant – moving to expand the program's eligibility ensuring that more British Columbians have the skills they need for the jobs ahead ¹³.

While these commitments require significant improvement and many of these commitments do not address the larger problem of student affordability, it is important that we ensure the provincial government is held responsible for these action items. These commitments were solidified by the recently published ministerial mandate letters. As a result, we will be advocating for the establishment of the above-mentioned monetary relief to ensure that students are able to recover a small portion of the money they lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2 ACTION ITEMS

- Advocating for the establishment of the one-time monetary supplements to ensure that students are being somewhat supported
 - **Subsequent:** advocate for monetary and frequency increases with regards to the two above-mentioned monetary supplements. These increases could result in several deposits made to students of a similar or increased amount.
- Work with the Indigenous Committee on the formulation of a recommendation surrounding a one-time monetary supplement to ensure that Indigenous students who are not band funded have their needs met as a result of the economic impacts imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Working with the Student Services Manager to ensure that the AMS Foodbank is able to receive funding from any allocations made towards food security and to work with the Food Security Initiative at UBC to shift the narrative on food insecurity away from the status quo solution.
- In coordination with student unions across British Columbia, ensuring that the expansion of the BC Access Grant is geared towards the inclusion of graduate students. The current commitment is vague and therefore, there is room to direct the provincial government in the correct direction.
- Advocate for the establishment of a student wage subsidy to ensure that students are being given ample job opportunities during a time when unemployment has devastated young people and by extension, the majority of students.
 - **Subsequent:** We would like to change the narrative away from “young people” towards ensuring policymakers are not leaving “students” behind. The wording and budgetary allocations towards “young people” excludes mature students who, in many cases, study at a graduate level and face identical or amplified issues.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

- **Rec. 1:** Establish a quarterly monetary supplement program of \$1,000 to families whose household income is under \$125,000 – with a sliding scale up to \$175,000 and \$500 to single people earning less than \$62,000 annually – with a sliding scale up to \$87,000.

- **Rec. 2:** Establish a one-time monetary supplement program of \$500 to Indigenous families whose household income is under \$125,000 – with a sliding scale of up to \$175,000 and \$250 to single Indigenous people earning less than \$62,000 annually – with a sliding scale of up to \$87,000.
- **Rec. 3:** Increased funding towards food security initiatives such as food hubs in understanding that many individuals facing food insecurity have reported mental health concerns around accessing food banks and establishing partnerships with more grocery stores and not-for-profits.
 - **Rec. 3-1:** Expand food bank funding eligibility criteria to include non-profit organizations to ensure that more organizations addressing food insecurity across BC are able to access government sources of funding.
- **Rec. 4:** Expand the BC Access Grant to include graduate students due to the important role that they play in the current and future state of British Columbia’s workforce and by extension, economic development.
- **Rec. 5:** Address the record-high student unemployment rates through the establishment of a student employment wage subsidy to ensure that students are able to support themselves through part-time job opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1 POST SECONDARY POLICY AND OPERATIONAL FUNDING

In June, the AMS commissioned its BC Budget 2021 Consultation Submission through both written and video format. The submission outlined the need for a review of the operational funding formula which currently provides post-secondary institutions in British Columbia with 36% of their operational budgets ¹⁴. During the 1970s and 1980s, the provincial government funded post-secondary institutional operational budgets by 80% to 90% ¹⁵. With the gradual decrease in funding, post-secondary institutions had to re-cooperate their financial losses through tuition increases and budget cuts which, in certain cases, impacted student services. The submission also included a subsequent recommendation which advocated for the allowance of post-secondary institutions to run budget deficits which would take legislative amendments to the University Act.

In August, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services accepted the AMS’ recommendation and recommended that the government “explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic” ¹⁶. In October, the NDP committed towards conducting a funding review of post-secondary operating grants as a way of ensuring economic recovery and student success ¹⁷. This promise was further solidified in the Minister of Advanced Education’s mandate letter. In addition, the NDP made significant promises with regards to other post-secondary policies. Here are some key examples of the commitments that were made:

- Strengthening the existing Tuition Fee Limit Policy which caps domestic tuition increases to no more than 2% per annum.
- Conducting a funding review of post-secondary education operating grants to make sure that post-secondary institutions are aligned for economic recovery and student success¹⁸.
- Expanding tuition waivers to all former youth in care and lifting the current obstacles of age restrictions^{19 20}.

In understanding that these commitments are rather large-scale and would allow for monumental change with regards to tuition increases and the general cost of education, the AMS will be making certain that the commitments made above are prioritized. Operational funding has the opportunity to revolutionize the manner in which post-secondary institutions increase tuition. As a result, the AMS will be pursuing several objectives with regards to its lobbying efforts towards the provincial government.

4.2 ACTION ITEMS

- Work with the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Finance and Government Services along with other student unions, to ensure that the above-mentioned funding review is properly administered and takes into account not only the student perspective, but also the perspective of staff and faculty associations.
- Using post-secondary administrative precedents such as the establishment of cohort tuition to make certain that international students are being given financial predictability measures.
- Advocating for the expansion of tuition waivers to all former youth in care – providing all former youth in care, regardless of age, with access to post-secondary learning tuition free.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

- **Rec. 1:** Conduct a review of post-secondary operational funding in consultation with student unions, organizations, and post-secondary institutions across British Columbia to ensure that the review takes into account all interested perspectives.
- **Rec. 2:** Ensure that post-secondary institutions are providing predictability measures to international students with regards to tuition fees throughout their education.
- **Rec. 3:** Fulfill the government's commitment to expand the tuition waiver program to all former Youth-in-Care in order to make certain that Indigenous people are being given equitable academic opportunities.

5.1 SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Throughout the year, the AMS has been pursuing a reform to post-secondary institutional sexual violence policies as they lack minimum standards. Currently, post-secondary institutions are legally required to create minimal sexual violence policies as mandated by the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act. This lack of minimum standards allows post-secondary institutions to establish barebones and less comprehensive sexual violence and misconduct policies. As a result, their policies are missing important sexual violence prevention and comprehension pillars such as being trauma-informed, survivor-centric, intersectionality, and other pillars.

The AMS, in 2019, commissioned its Sexual Violence Discrepancies project which surveys the sexual violence policies of all the post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The project allows us to see that larger post-secondary institutions with their increased resources, are able to create comprehensive policies which are trauma-informed, survivor-centric, and intersectional. The pattern we begin to see, however, is that smaller higher education institutions have less comprehensive policies and at many times, barebones policies. The NDP, with their newly acquired majority, have made the following promise:

- Developing an action plan to end gender-based violence, including minimum standards for sexual assault response, more training for police, crown council, and justices; establishing core funding for sexual assault centers; and more ²¹ ²².

With the new provincial government establishing their commitment towards policy and budgetary allocations with regards to sexualized and gender-based violence, the AMS will continue to pursue its sexual violence prevention advocacy efforts. This commitment allows us to ensure a reform of the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act as well as ensure that post-secondary institutions are being given adequate resources to establish dedicated offices towards the prevention of sexual violence.

5.2 ACTION ITEMS

- Use the Sexual Violence Discrepancies project to advocate to the provincial government that legislative reform is needed with regards to ending post-secondary institution-related sexual violence.
- Advocate to the provincial government, along with other student organizations, that budgetary commitments towards ensuring that all post-secondary institutions have a dedicated sexual violence prevention office.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENT

- **Rec. 1:** Conduct a review into the lack of minimum standards in the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Act to ensure that post-secondary institutions are forming comprehensive sexual violence and misconduct policies that are trauma-informed, intersectional, and survivor-centric.

- ¹ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: David Eby*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/cabinet/cabinet-ministers>
- ² Mentioned by David Eby at the AMS All Candidates' Debate: further rental support programs would be inclusive of student housing.
- ³ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Selina Robinson*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/cabinet/cabinet-ministers>
- ⁴ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: David Eby*.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ BC New Democratic Party. "Working For you: John Horgan's Commitments to BC". October 2020
- ⁸ This advocacy point is subject to consultation by the AMS Indigenous Committee.
- ⁹ Statistics Canada (2020). *British Columbia: Labour Force Survey*. Published July 10, 2020. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/data/statistics/employment-labour-market/lfs_highlights.pdf
- ¹⁰ Statistics Canada (2020). *British Columbia: Labour Force Survey*. Published: October 9, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/201009/dq201009a-eng.pdf?st=XZ8cKOX7>
- ¹¹ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Selina Robinson*.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/cabinet/cabinet-ministers>
- ¹⁴ Statistics Canada (2019). "Financial information of universities and degree-granting colleges, 2017/2018". Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/190724/dq190724a-eng.pdf?st=2YGi-hmv>
- ¹⁵ British Columbia Federation of Students. "Fund It, Fix It: Making post-secondary education affordable for British Columbians". 2019.
- ¹⁶ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. "Report on the Budget 2021 Consultation". Volume 1. August 2020: pg. 21.
- ¹⁷ BC New Democratic Party. "Working For you: John Horgan's Commitments to BC". October 2020: pg. 47.
- ¹⁸ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*.
- ¹⁹ BC New Democratic Party. "Working For you: John Horgan's Commitments to BC". October 2020: pg. 47.
- ²⁰ Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Anne Kang*.
- ²¹ BC New Democratic Party. "Working For you: John Horgan's Commitments to BC". October 2020: pg. 32
- ²² Government of British Columbia. *Mandate Letter: Mike Farnworth*. November 26, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/cabinet/cabinet-ministers>