Hello Council,

We’re almost at the end of the semester! I just handed in a final and the sense of relief is real. I will be working a bit less over the holidays to enjoy some rest and relaxation, so I’m working to get a couple big projects off the ground before then-- and of course close out a couple little ones.

Strathcona County PSE Roundtable

I was invited to a meeting of the Strathcona County Youth Advisory Committee last Thursday to talk about ways we can increase accessibility to post-secondary in Sherwood Park. It was a great opportunity, as the UASU represents hundreds of students living in Strathcona County. We had a lively, friendly, and engaging conversation on a variety of topics. Some of the issues we raised include:

- The role of municipalities in providing strong transit access to campuses
- The importance of zoning that allows basement suites, garage suites, duplexes, and other forms of “gentle density” in order to create housing stock that is appropriate and affordable for students
- The changes in the Alberta economy, the role of universities in retraining the workforce, and how that impacts the economy in Strathcona County
- The role of municipalities as advocates to higher levels of government for a strong post-secondary system in Alberta
- And much more!

CAUS Institutional Development

In order to be more effective advocates, I am organizing the legal process to allow the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) to advertise as a third-party political advertiser in Alberta (what you might hear called a “PAC” sometimes). I am also making the legal arrangements to let us collect private donations to fund political advertising. The cost of developing these capabilities is fairly low, but it is a big step forward in our ability to communicate with Albertans and influence public opinion. While I have always been deeply uncomfortable with the role big money plays in our politics, we need to be in the game to avoid being drowned out, and will be taking precautions to make sure we only take ethical and responsible donations.

The other advantage is this will allow us to do a lot more interesting work funded by donations and not students. In a time of limited budgets this can help us take our...
research and campaigns to the next level. Fortunately, because of the way election laws work in Alberta, we would only be collecting money from small donors (under $5000), meaning we won’t have big donors influencing our advocacy. I will have more exciting news about this later in the year.

**Edmonton Municipal Budget**
I worked to arrange for the Edmonton Student Alliance to present at the City of Edmonton’s budget hearings on the 3rd. The City is trying to cut spending this year to allow for a 0% property tax increase, and was looking to make cuts to transit service frequency as well as closing three pools and two community rinks. As students, and because of UASU political policy, my biggest concern has been preventing transit frequency reductions. Several councillors have now raised preventing or reducing transit cuts as a priority so I am hoping that will happen. The last thing any of us want in -30 weather is to wait longer for busses, and we especially don’t want fuller buses during COVID.

**Alberta 2030 Review Updates**
The Alberta 2030 post-secondary review has taken up a lot of my time in the last few months, but I’m pleased to say that I think we are starting to see some results. Obviously nothing is final, but I am relieved by some signs we are seeing. The CAUS board and I met with the Minister to discuss the review last week, particularly emphasizing our concerns around the devastating impact tuition deregulation could have on students and the risk of a US-style spiral of rising costs, rising student aid demands, and rising tuition and borrowing. I am glad that the Minister acknowledged this problem and invited us back to a future roundtable discussion on tuition policy. We will be continuing to fight for strict regulation of tuition and a defined connection between any future increases and generous student aid.

Good luck on finals everyone! This is a really rough time and like many of you, I’ve been having a hard time staying focused and preserving my mental health. Please reach out if you have any questions or just want to chat, and I hope you all have a well deserved rest over the holidays.

Sincerely,

University of Alberta Students’ Union Vice President External
Rowan Ley