2017 Municipal Elections

Brendan Van Alstine, Acting NASA Communications Officer

On Monday, October 16th Edmontonians, along with citizens across Alberta once again go to the polls to elect their municipal representatives and school board trustees. Municipal elections tend to be low-key affairs. In the last election, held in 2013, less than 35% of eligible Edmontonians bothered to cast a ballot, and it’s rare that city elections attract more than 40%. In fact the last time more than half of eligible voters turned out for a municipal election was way back in 1995 when 50.3% of voters came out. But with power over things such as roadways, transit, parks, recreation services, police, bylaw, development and a whole host of other issues, it could be argued that it’s the decisions made at the municipal level, rather than those enacted by the province or in Ottawa, that have the most direct impact on our day to day lives. “The election touches you very near and dear in where you live and how you live,” said Iain MacLean, director of elections and census for the city, “we want people to participate in the democratic process of the municipal election.” School board races often draw even less attention than City Council elections, but decisions made at the board level can have a big impact on communities – recall the contentious decision a few years ago to close a number of low-attendance inner-city schools. And given how closely the post-secondary sector works with school boards, the school board elections should be of particular relevance to many NASA members.

Candidates are not official until nomination day – September 18 – when they file their official papers with the city to become candidates, and with a relatively popular mayor and few well-known contenders for the job, some pundits are expecting a dry race. There are, however, 10 challengers who have declared their intentions to take on incumbent Mayor Don Iveson, and over 60 candidates who have announced their intentions to run in Edmonton’s 12 different municipal wards, and that’s not including school board candidates.
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Add to that three wards with no incumbents – Ward 4 in the northeast; Ward 5 in the west and Ward 9 in the south – and it’s possible we could still see a major shake-up on the next council. With such low turn-out too it doesn’t take a whole lot of people to swing the vote, so having an engaged and committed group of voters that turns out on election day can make all the difference, and with so much contention surrounding a wide range of municipal issues some might argue that it’s important now more than ever for people to get out and have their say by voting.

It’s not just Edmonton who’s having an election though – municipal elections are a province-wide affair, and in the Edmonton region alone there are five cities, eleven towns, three villages, three municipal districts, one special municipality and a handful of summer villages – and while election dates and rules are set by the province, each of these municipalities is responsible for running their own elections. For a list of local candidates and other election information please contact your local municipality or consult their website.

You may be interested to note that NASA member Samantha Hees is running for Edmonton City Council in ward 10, and another recent NASA member, Bridget Stirling, is running for re-election to the Edmonton Public School Board. Please note that sharing information about the political activities of NASA members does not constitute an official endorsement. We encourage you to research all the candidates in your area and ask them questions, particularly about their opinions relating to post-secondary education.

EDLC’s 28th Annual Labour Day BBQ

Lindsay Baranowski, NASA Treasurer

This Labour Day I had the opportunity to lead NASA’s team of volunteers at the Edmonton and District Labour Council’s Labour Day BBQ for the Unemployed and Underemployed at Giovanni Caboto Park. This was the 28th year for the event, which is a chance for members of the labour movement to offer support to fellow workers who have fallen on hard times. It’s also an occasion for workers to connect with the community and one another, and to demonstrate our support for each other and for all working people.

The day featured free food, live music, and even a bouncy castle. The weather was beautiful, and the event went smoothly with the help of countless volunteers. Although many of the volunteers were from different unions and organizations and were strangers at the start of the day, we all worked together in the spirit of cooperation and with a shared purpose of serving others.

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Our group of about ten NASA members was eager to help out wherever we were needed; our members helped set up, prepare food, serve guests, and keep the site clean. I was proud to lead a team that demonstrated such a positive attitude, strong work ethic and willingness to give their time and energy.

A number of municipal, provincial and federal politicians stopped by to pitch in, including NASA’s former president and MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie Rod Loyola. This provided a great opportunity for elected members from multiple levels of government to see the strength of the labour movement in action, but more importantly, the event served as a way to reach out to the larger community and show them the values that our organizations stand for, including hard work, cooperation, fairness and compassion. When we represent NASA this way in the broader community, we show them what we’re all about, and although we take part in this event to help others, it’s nice to know that our participation in events like this one contribute toward building a positive image of NASA and our members in the community.

Although the name of the event mentions the unemployed and underemployed, it has to be acknowledged that it’s not just workers who come out for a meal and an afternoon of fun. Every year there are just as many families in attendance, including children, grandparents and others. This highlights for us that workers’ rights are a larger issue, affecting not just workers but also their families, and communities. By taking part in events like this one our members are able to gain an appreciation for that fact and feel connected to our community.

Though people often think of the labour movement as being made up of organized groups like unions, it’s important for us as workers who benefit from the protection of a union to remember and show solidarity with those who are out of work or underemployed. This reminds us not only of the importance of our unions in protecting our rights in the workplace, but also of the need to push for improved conditions for all workers, so that they and their families can benefit from the same protections that we enjoy.

I want to close by thanking all the members who volunteered their time and effort this Labour Day. We are stronger as a union because of members like these. If you would like to get more involved with NASA, please consider volunteering for this and other great events in future.
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