

Tap into people's dignity and they will do anything for you. Ignore it and they won't lift a finger.
Thomas Friedman

ATA Local #48 News

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The Continuing Saga

During President Bruseker's recent meeting with Education Minister Zwodzdesky, the subject of the unfunded liability came up once again. It was however initiated by the Minister in response to concerns expressed when he was at PEC. He said that as he learns more he is realizing that this is an issue of great concern. He especially noted the problem for young teachers and asked that the UFL be on the agenda for a future meeting. While this is positive, it is a concern that he is still learning about the issue. We have not done our jobs in informing MLAs about this problem and need to do so if any solution is to be found. It does us little good to convince Gene and then have it poo-pooed by the caucus because they just don't get it. Everywhere I travel to meet with teachers the UFL comes up. Let's make sure that if it comes to caucus that they "get it" this time. Phone, write, e-mail so your MLA can make the right choice.

PUBLIC EDUCATION WORKS - With an Informed Government - Greg Jeffrey District Rep.

Candidates for the positions of ATA Vice-President will be in Fort McMurray on February 9 and will be at an informal meeting in the Reflections Dining Room at Keyano College at 5:00 PM. All ATA members are invited to attend.

GETCA Notes

- Thank you to those who have volunteered to be chairpeople. We ask that you attend a brief orientation meeting at 4:00 on Fri. Feb. 11 at St. Gabriel.
- You should have received your GETCA book in your mailbox last week. Student teachers receive their copy at the information desk in the Shaw Conference Centre. If you did not receive a copy please contact Lesly, Nancy or Jane ASAP.
- Pre-registration starts February 4 at 7:00.
- There are several social events planned including breakfast with Camilla Jones, lunch with Louis Riel and Nellie McLung and "The Taste of Convention" on Thursday. If you want tickets for these events please contact Lesly Johnson. Wind Down will take place Friday in the Citadel Theatre.
- **Your booklet is required for admission to sessions;** replacement copies are available at the info booth for \$6.00
- The Brier (National Curling Finals) starts on March 5 so you should contact your desired hotel as soon as possible to ensure that you get the accommodations you want.
- **A reminder that it is your professional responsibility to attend convention as it is a legal requirement of the School Act and the School Board pays us a convention allowance**

For more information please contact **Lesly Johnson** at 791-6768 (H), 791-3121(W) or leslyj@shaw.ca; **Nancy Ball** at 743-8257 (H), 791-6990 (W) or ndball@shaw.ca; **Jane Kumpf** at 791-0089 (H), 799-5745 (W) or jkumpf@telusplanet.net

Making Democracy Work for Alberta's Future

Political engagement does not require a lot of time and money. By becoming politically engaged with the party of your choice, you can help determine the conditions under which you teach and your students learn. Perhaps most importantly, your engagement will help demonstrate to them through personal example the values of citizenship and democracy.

Participating in a Constituency Association

Of all the ways you can be politically active, joining and participating in the work of a constituency association is perhaps the most direct and rewarding. You will have close access to your MLA or the potential candidates in your community. This makes it one of the best "gateways" to further political involvement, including running for office yourself. Working actively for the constituency association also means that you can tackle the issues that most affect your community. You may well have valuable networking possibilities with important community stakeholders.

Participating in a constituency association is also essential to becoming more active in a political party. It shows loyalty and helps you gain influence with other party members. Moreover, involvement at the constituency level is crucial to understanding how a party operates. Many of the rules around candidate nomination, for example, are complicated, and to support the candidate you prefer, or if you want to be a candidate yourself, constituency participation is vital to understanding the process.

If you choose to join a constituency association of the governing party, you greatly increase your chances of being selected to serve on a government-appointed board. This is interesting and rewarding work. You could sit on a board of a post-secondary institution or a hospital, work on rural development issues, or serve the charitable sector for an organization like the Wild Rose Foundation.

ATA - Barnett House

1-800-232-7208

www.teachers.ab.ca

Local #48

www.members.shaw.ca/poitraser/atalocal48.html

The first step in participating in a constituency association is joining the party. Then confirm what constituency it is you live in. Elections Alberta has the information you need. Visit their website, www.electionsalberta.ab.ca or call 310-0000. All you need to know is your postal code.

All of the major Alberta political parties should have active associations in each of the province's 83 constituencies. Contact the party and ask who is the representative for your local constituency. You should then be able to find out from that person when the constituency association is holding its next meeting. Right now is the best time to get involved. Now that the 2004 provincial election is over, party politics has calmed down, and you might well be able to secure an influential position in your local association.

If your community doesn't have an active constituency association, you should be able to start one. The party is likely to encourage your efforts given that its strength in elections depends on its strength in every part of Alberta.

Participating in a constituency association is a rewarding experience. It's where the grassroots work of politics happens. It is also where the fate is decided of anyone with political aspirations, right from an eager volunteer to the next premier.

Council Meetings

Council Meetings are held in the **Reflections Dining Room at Keyano** and start at 4:15 with food.

February 16

March 16

April 20

May 18

June 15

The Public School Board is considering moving to the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan.

www.asebp.ab.ca

The deadline for the next newsletter is March 11. Please send any important dates, quotes, articles or news to Earl Clayton at eclayton@telusplanet.net.

Making Your Voice Heard

Although the provincial election is over, Alberta's political scene is far from quiet. This is actually one of the busiest times of year. Ministers will be learning the ropes of their new portfolios, and opposition critics will be looking for issues that will help them gain credibility as government watchdogs. This is an ideal time to get politicians to listen.

If you are advocating on a personal issue, the first point of call should be your local MLA. Your MLA's party colours should not matter—he or she is paid to listen. No matter what you think of your MLA, always go to him or her first, because any other government representative you approach afterwards will ask whether or not you have already done so.

The best way to state your concern to your MLA is through a handwritten letter. If you send a form letter, don't be surprised to receive a form letter in response. A personal letter signals to the MLA that you've taken time to express yourself in your own words.

Meeting face to face with an MLA is even more effective. Most MLAs designate certain days of the week as constituency days. You can book an appointment to meet with them on these days, or you might even get a meeting by walking in directly off the street.

If your MLA cannot or will not help you, contact the government ombudsman. The ombudsman is charged with dealing with unresolved complaints. The ombudsman's office itself may not be able to address your concern, but staff should be able to direct you to a government agency that can.

Acting collectively can also help to ensure that your voice is heard. Although individual form letters generally have little impact, a letter signed by 5,000 Albertans and publicly delivered on the same day would create excitement. Giving local reporters advance warning could make it a media event. The Internet has opened up other possibilities. For example, earlier this fall, an Alberta group lobbying the Canadian government to solve the BSE crisis managed to get more than 100,000 people to sign its

online petition.

Formal processes are also available to groups wishing to have their voices heard. The government has several standing policy committees that are responsible for listening to policy stakeholders, industry representatives and concerned citizens or groups. The committee dedicated to learning and employment, for example, has heard presentations from groups specifically advocating for smaller classes and increased supports for special needs children. This committee makes recommendations on education policy at meetings usually attended by the education minister. In addition, special consultative committees--such as the Learning Commission--are struck from time to time. Present your issue; tell your story.

Making your voice heard takes time and effort, but the exercise is vital to a healthy democracy. Elections are like final exams in which the government gets either a pass or a fail. But the real work of democracy occurs between elections, when active citizens can affect the government.

ATA Conference on Building and Sustaining PLCs: Lessons Learned

Sponsored by the ATA, this conference, which takes place in Edmonton from March 17 to 19, 2005, will examine the issues schools encounter as they build professional learning communities. The conference program is now available at www.teachers.ab.ca

Upcoming Seminars

There are two seminars in the near future.

The Teacher Welfare Area Conference takes place on Saturday February 26 in Edmonton. If you are interested in attending this as a representative for the Public School Board please contact Gary Marcellus at 743-2444 (W) or 743-2720 (H) ASAP.

A Political Action Seminar will take place on March 4/5 in Edmonton. If you are interested please contact Gary Marcellus at 743-2444 (W) or 743-2720 (H).