THE PANELLISTS

RAI PANNU served as leader of the Alberta NDP from 2000-2004, and is now retired from the Edmonton-Strathcona riding, which he has represented since 1997. Prior to his political career, Pannu taught educational policy studies and sociology from 1969-1996 at the University of Alberta, where he is now Professor Emeritus.

A recent political science graduate, SAM POWER served as SU president in 2006/07 and is currently news director at CJSR. In 2007, she also worked for Public Interest Alberta, a provincial advocacy group.

IAN URGQUART is an associate professor in the Political Science department, where he specializes in the politics of Alberta, the oilsands, and the environment. He has also served as director of the Alberta Wilderness Institute.

 election
dissection

PROVINCIAL EDITION

With the provincial election approaching on Monday, we asked a panel of three distinguished political commentators and Dave Cournoyer for their thoughts. From how the election will affect students and the postsecondary world to big-picture issues like oilsands and the environment, our panellists open up the province and peer into its democratic underbelly to help you decide.

Compiled by ADAM GAINARD

PAGE 16

I'm not a student, I'm looking at affordability of education. I'm looking at affordable housing, those two issues now are my top two issues [...] I only see the NDP and the Liberals talking about that right now. The Conservatives are talking about the same thing that they've been doing before. One of the points of their platform was to continue with CPI increases [...] so from a student perspective, there are the types of issues that would be on my mind, but I'm not sure any of the parties have really grasped an issue enough to really motivate people to come out on an issue basis.

If you were to open the minds of a student—what are they looking for?

JAN URQUHART, DOCTORAL STUDENT: "If the issues that Dave mentions—if the issues of nation and affordable housing, those sorts of issues—were uppermost in your mind, I think it would be impossible to vote Conservative. If those are the issues that really matter to you, and you were going to cast your ballot based on your position on those issues [...] there is just such a difference between the Liberal and New Democrat positions on these issues compared to the governing Tories, it's impossible for someone who thought those were their key issues in the campaign to then say, 'I'm going to vote Conservative because of it.'"

I'm going to vote Conservative because of it?

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What party do you think has done the best job, platform-wise, of going after the student vote?

SANTANJA POWER, RP: "I'm not sure if there's been focused on institutional kinds of reforms at the University and not a huge amount on the student side of things. And when it is on the student side, it's like grants and loans, which is nice, but not the fundamental problem of the actual affordability of education. So I'd like to see more in terms of actually reducing costs and supporting students from an undergraduate perspective.

Outside of the platform, I think the Liberals and the New Democrats have done a good job of mobilizing students just in terms of getting them involved in the campaign. I see a ton of youth involved in campaigns."

RAI PANNU, NDP: "I think the NDP on the tuition issue, on the public housing for students, and on student loans issue, they think they have taken some fairly clear positions—if students look at them from up close, I think they'd find them attractive. Because [...] in a sense, students' anxiety is mostly financial. Quality of education is an issue that none of the parties is really focusing on, but on the affordability side, the NDP have offered three specifics, which are better than we did when I was leader and even in the last election, so they're quite focused, so that might be something that'll attract some attention."

I think they've gone the furthest in terms of those issues. The Liberals have gone in that direction somewhat as well. I think you make a really good point about the quality of teaching. You know, we're hearing lots about hiring other professionals in public-service institutions, and when you say that, then a bell rings in my head and it says, 'Well there's been absolutely nothing said about faculty,' and I don't mean another research chair."

RP: "It's class size. It's quality of contact and student-teacher relationships. You know, I left campus in '96 thinking about those things—not a new problem. It's a problem that was creeping up on us in the late '80s and into the '90s. I think it's an unhappy about what was happening to the quality of instruction and contact and contact on campus. Classes have become too big, there's not enough room in the libraries for students to go and study. Classrooms looking drab and overcrowded. That's an issue that simply isn't getting attention and really needs to get attention.

And that's where the faculty comes in. Teaching loads, faculty are somewhat lucky in that they can process themselves against—except for class size—how many hours they teach, but ask the sessions, who now constitute 46 percent of the instructional staff. And so it's been handled onto their shoulders, and what happens when you overload people with teaching responsibilities? The quality of what you do is bound to go down. No fault of the instructors, who get paid less, have to work more, and have to cut corners somewhere."

The televised leadership debate was comprised of Blaine Stenstrom, Kevin Taft, Brian Mason, and Wildrose Alliance Leader Paul Hinman. Meanwhile, George Read and the Green Party were excluded, despite fielding candidates in all but four ridings.

What should be the criteria be for inclusion in the televised debate?

IU: "The question of who gets to play is really an important one, and I don't think necessarily I would go with, 'If you can nominate candidates in all the constituencies or even most of the constituencies.' But maybe we should be thinking about things like judging the appeal and the potential for that appeal as grows, and think of it like proportional representation systems, when you get to that point of the popular vote in most PR systems we get some seats in the legislature. So you might want to think about it in that way, that how do you do in the popular vote in this election would weigh whatever your leader got in participation in debate."

FEATURE