

# REASSERTING THE PUBLIC GOOD

IN A CORPORATIZED WORLD



## Board Chair Report

**I**t has definitely been a good year for advocacy in support of the public interest in Alberta, and I believe PIA's work over the past twelve months has made an important contribution to promoting stronger public services and the public good in our province.

Alberta's political situation in the past year offered dramatic challenges, particularly with respect to the government's misguided policies that not only cut funding to public services but also involved a gratuitous assault on public sector workers and their unions and associations.

At the same time, those regressive policies helped to galvanize opposition to the government's agenda, and the push back from labour and civil society organizations unquestionably played a crucial role in the resignation of Premier Redford and the dramatic decline of her party in public opinion polls. I am very pleased at the role played by PIA in contributing to these important efforts.

The role played by PIA's Seniors Task Force provided an excellent example of such effective advocacy. The Alberta government continued its wrong-headed approach to seniors' health care issues, and stated its intention to eliminate the universal nature of the seniors' pharmaceutical plan and to institute a means-tested approach. PIA responded with forums on seniors' health issues in eleven



locations in the province, and task force members eventually occupied the constituency office of Minister Fred Horne. As a result, the government announced that it was abandoning its proposed policy on means-testing – a victory not only for seniors' health care, but for the importance of universal programs as well.

In the past year PIA also made a key contribution to advocating for the crucial need for revenue reform for Alberta's government. Strong public services require adequate and fair taxation, and PIA's "Alberta Could ..." campaign was launched this spring to provide an effective ongoing platform to support progressive taxation and fair corporate taxes to pay for strong

public services and programs.

These efforts this year were part of a broader program of PIA's ongoing advocacy through its task forces and campaigns, as well as a highly successful annual advocacy conference that involved internationally-regarded advocate Vandana Shiva and other first-rate conference speakers.

As PIA board chair, I want to thank PIA's committed and highly effective staff, the members of our task forces, our many volunteers, our Board of Directors, and our individual and organizational members whose generosity and commitment make all of these efforts possible.

*Larry Booi, President*

## Executive Director Report

It is hard to believe that Public Interest Alberta has been advocating for better quality public services and institutions for ten years.

As you will see in the reports from our seven task forces, we have been very busy and successful in many of our key advocacy action areas. Thanks to the support of our individual and member organizations and the strategic direction provided by our Board of Directors and the Task Force members, we have been able to build broad public awareness and support for the need for more investments in public services. While the governing PC party continues to cut and privatize various public services, support for more investments in public services remains the top priority for 47% of Albertans in the Environics poll that we commissioned for the launch of our new “Alberta Could...” campaign. This is compared to only 4% who said the government should cut taxes.

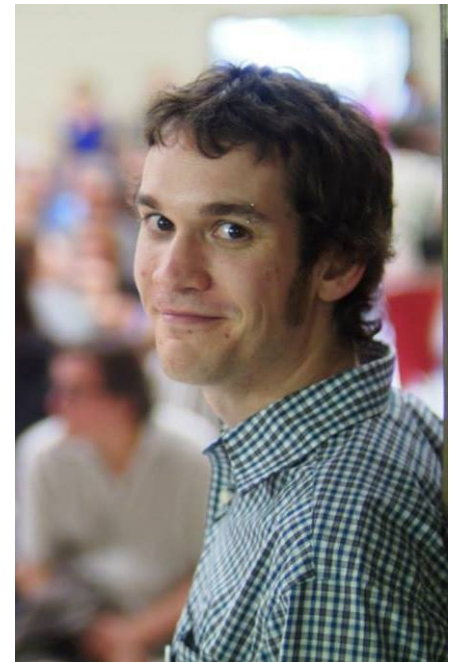
The public and media profile of PIA continues to grow thanks to our communications staff, Sheryle Carlson (who moved on to a new position at the U of A in February) and Joel French who is now the new Communications Coordinator. Over the last year we have: published three issues of the Advocate; issued 36 media releases; held many media conferences; coordinated three rallies; held a sit in at Minister Fred Horne’s office; travelled the province on two speaking tours; launched the new Alberta Could campaign and increased our activity and followers on Twitter and Facebook.

Our outreach around the province has also expanded this past year thanks to our Calgary Outreach Coordinator Julie Hrdlicka and our Community Mobilizers, Alison Van Dyke (Medicine Hat), Lorinda Peel (Lethbridge), Stephen Merredew (Red Deer) and Heather Haiste (Grande Prairie). Julie and the mobilizers

represented PIA in the media, spoke at events and rallies, helped coordinate our speaking tours and promoted the advocacy work of our task forces locally. Thanks to an increase in our membership revenues, we have decided to increase the staff hours for our Outreach Coordinator, but have also decided to rethink the Community Mobilizer model.

Thanks also to our fabulous Office Manager, Karen Werlin, who has been instrumental in communicating with all of our members, coordinating the logistics for our fundraising events and new member outreach, helping to coordinate our conference and staying on top of all of our finances, office needs and support for me and our Board of Directors. As you can see in our annual financial statements we were able to increase our revenue and reduce some of our expenditures so that we are on a solid financial footing. Now if only we could convince the provincial government to do the same.

*Bill Moore-Kilgannon, Executive Director*



PIA Staff: Julie Hrdlicka (Outreach Coordinator), Sheryle Carlson (previous Communications Coordinator), Karen Werlin (Office Manager), Bill Moore-Kilgannon (Executive Director), and Joel French (Communications Coordinator).



## Childcare Task Force

We have seen a busy and challenging year with the 2013 Alberta Budget removal of the Accreditation Enhancement Grants, the release of the Alberta Report on Child Poverty and the release of the province's "Social Policy Framework" which have all provided the Task Force with opportunities for advocacy and ally building within our communities.

As task force chair, I spoke at the Allyson Pollock anti-privatization session in Edmonton in February 2014, on the growth of corporate childcare in Alberta; as well as in Lethbridge, addressing early learning and childcare as a part of the "Alberta Could" campaign in May 2014.

Our Calgary coordinator, Julie Hrdlicka has been working very hard building alliances and communicating the task force recommendations as well as organizing a town hall gathering in February of 2014, with about 30 in attendance. From that meeting we have been able to build our allies and strengthen our networks in the Calgary area. Julie also spoke on a public panel on childcare organized by MLA David Swann and had the opportunity to speak at Bow Valley College to an early education class on advocacy.

In Medicine Hat, PIA mobilizer Alison Van Dyke organized a well-attended childcare town hall in March of 2014. The discussion included ECE professionals and parents and received positive media attention. Concerns about quality, accessibility and affordability were some of the key concerns for the Medicine Hat group as well as the task force members.

A notable highlight of the year for the task force featured Martha Friendly, Executive Director of the Child Care Research and Resource Unit (CRRU), who attended the 2014 PIA Advocacy Conference as a plenary panelist and workshop co-host with our task force chair. Martha spoke on the emergence of corporate "big box" style childcare and her concerns with the "market model" in childcare. The plenary



and workshop were well attended, with a great discussion and advocacy strategy sharing session.

The task force plans for the upcoming year include further building of our advocacy network in the various regions and looking at ways to advocate in a more strategic and issue-specific manner on the recommendations made in our advocacy brochure.

*Sherry Hunt, Chair*

## Democracy Task Force

Throughout the past year the central focus of the task force was on issues related to the need for election and party finance reform. The problems with Alberta's dismally weak legislation in this regard continue to result in a skewed system that allows far too much influence for wealthy individuals and corporate interests, which in turn continues to be reflected in government programs that clearly favour those powerful interests.

The task force's actions and planning have been geared to taking advantage of a series of opportunities to promote more democratic alternatives for election and party financing policies, with a focus on advocating for policies that reflect the much more reasonable rules at the federal level. The key elements include much

lower contribution limits, banning corporate and union contributions, instituting spending limits and applying these same rules to party leadership and nomination contests as well.

The current Progressive Conservative leadership contest allowed PIA to draw attention to the utterly undemocratic nature of the current PC rules, and to advocate for our proposals for a much more democratic approach.

The task force is planning to take advantage of the opportunities in the coming months to challenge the PC leadership candidates to support the proposals for campaign and party finance reform, and this will lead to a similar advocacy campaign to challenge political parties to do so as well during the lead-up to the next Alberta provincial election in 2016.

Our efforts in this area were also a central feature of PIA's annual advocacy conference in April, with an excellent keynote address and workshop provided by Craig Holman of the U.S. advocacy organization Public Citizen.

In addition, PIA's inquiry to Elections Alberta resulted in Human Resources Minister Manmeet Bhullar's constituency association having to pay back \$10,000 in illegal campaign contributions to a corporation.

I want to thank the members of the task force for their commitment and contributions over this past year and look forward to effectively promoting our more democratic alternatives in the year to come.

*Larry Booi, Chair*

## Education Task Force

**A**re we feeling inspired yet? Alberta Education and the Minister have spent another year inspiring Albertans to adopt transformative education. The department is determined to transform the curriculum in all subjects within a two year period. Historically, curriculum changes were done on a subject by subject basis and took upwards of five years to complete.

The Minister has determined he will transform the teaching profession. While retired teachers sat on his Task Force for Teaching Excellence, representing themselves, the profession, through the Alberta Teachers' Association, was deliberately not represented. What the

Minister achieved with the Task Force is a full blown conflict with teachers and principals. The most egregious recommendations call for principals to be removed from the ATA, conflate teacher conduct and competence matters, and call for five year term certification for teachers.

With all the busyness of transforming the curriculum and the profession, the Minister and his department have failed to deal with the real transformations occurring in Alberta's classrooms. The transformations caused by underfunding are devastating for students and include large class sizes, special needs students ignored, ESL or ELL students' programs

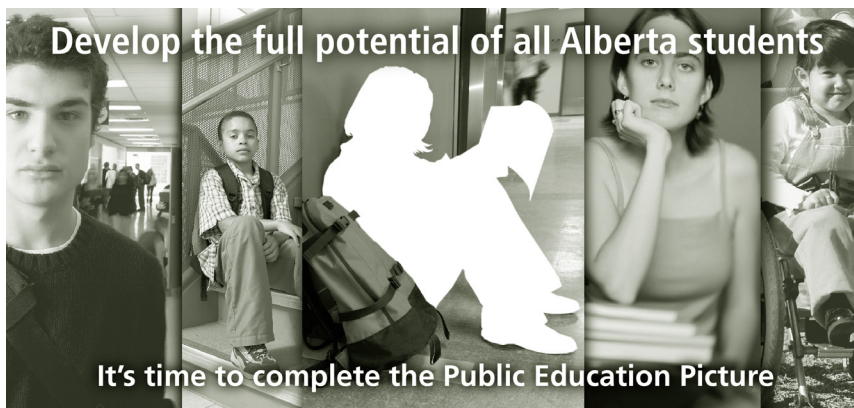
cut from seven to five years, and school maintenance and construction falling woefully behind promised timelines.

PIA's Education Task Force continues to advocate for the development of the full potential of all Alberta's students. In September, we directed trustee candidates in the major cities to Survey Monkey to respond to questions we had developed, and we promoted the joint trustee forum held by the two Edmonton teachers' locals. We also included the ATA's Vote 4 Kids campaign in our promotions and helped advise the ATA in its Stop the Cuts advocacy program. The Task Force also supported Unifor, CUPE and the AFL's "Kids Not Cuts" campaign.

Given that most of the struggles with learning conditions for students and teachers come down to underfunding, we have played an important role in advocating for increased tax revenues and strongly support PIA's "Alberta Could..." campaign.

In wealthy Alberta, advocacy continues to be a battle to preserve reasonable classroom learning conditions in the face of abject refusals to raise revenues.

*Harold Neth, Chair*



## Environment Task Force

**P**ublic Interest Alberta continues to advocate on three important environmental issues: the public control of water; climate change; and transitioning off fossil fuels.

The steering committee of the Our Water is Not for Sale campaign was expecting that the Alberta government was going to release its long-awaited water strategy after we participated in the public consultations the year prior. However, most likely due to the sudden resignation of Premier Redford, the government has not released its strategy yet. Meanwhile, the network of people signing on to the campaign has continued to grow, and we continue to make public presentations, including a First Nations' Conference in Slave Lake.

Public Interest Alberta supported various initiatives from partner

organizations to raise awareness about climate change. This included participation in the Tar Sands Healing Walk and the National Power Shift conference. Our Communications Coordinator, Sheryle Carlson played a key role representing PIA at these meetings and in supporting the communications efforts of various events and rallies.

We also continued to support the important advocacy work of a coalition of organizations who are calling for the phasing out of coal fired electrical generation in Alberta. We will continue to work with other partner groups to promote a transition from carbon intensive fuels towards renewable fuel sources. We look forward to co-hosting a meeting shortly with the National Green Economy Network where we will be exploring with environmental



organizations and unions how to support a campaign for green jobs.

PIA's annual conference had a number of speakers and workshops about the environment. In particular, keynote speaker Vandana Shiva helped educate and inspire conference participants on issues of water, GMO food and the corporate control of agriculture.

*Bill Moore-Kilgannon*



## Human Services & Poverty Task Force

**A**lison Redford's bold election promises to eliminate child poverty and reduce overall poverty were proven empty when the newly elected Redford government released their austerity budget in 2013. The Human Services & Poverty Task Force worked throughout the year to assess the damage done by the budget as well as to keep the progressive promises of the government alive.

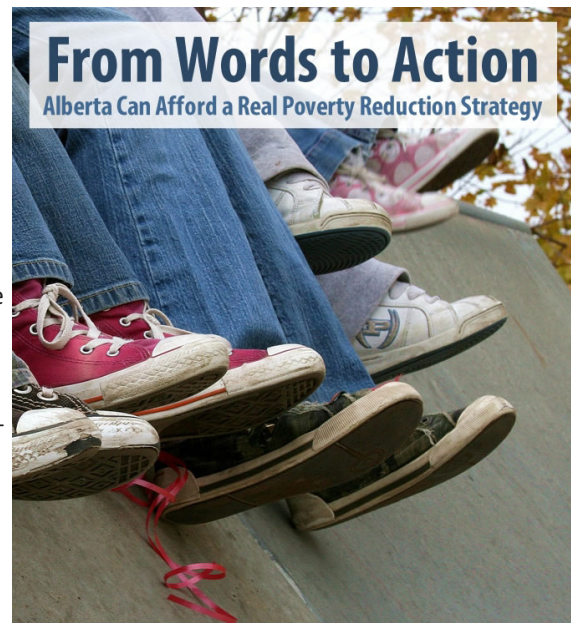
As a task force we gave extensive input into the consultation process of the Alberta Social Policy Framework that was released the spring of 2013. The framework identified a vision, general principles, actions and policy shifts but no clear poverty reduction targets were identified, so assessing whether the vision is being achieved becomes problematic. We are still awaiting the government's poverty reduction strategy which we understand will have specific targets to achieve the vision identified in the Alberta Social Policy Framework. During this time our members continue to advocate for a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy through municipal governments, professional bodies, religious organizations, and other associations.

In August we released low wage statistics that showed 21% of all em-

ployed Albertans (381,200 people) earn less than \$15 per hour. The statistics show that the majority of low-wage workers (62%) are women. Along with these economic challenges, social issues such as high rates of family violence and divorce mean women and children are suffering in our rich province. Increasing Alberta's minimum wage rate to the poverty line would go a long way in alleviating hardship for vulnerable women and children. Public education and advocacy continues regarding these significant economic and social issues.

The task force released the report "From Words to Action" on child poverty in November, 2013 in partnership with ACSW and the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The report shows there are 84,000 children (10.2%) that live below the Low Income Measure in Alberta. The report identifies a number of key factors that lead to the growing inequality in Alberta and outlines a series of solutions that Alberta could afford to include in a real poverty reduction strategy.

Besides the above initiatives, the task force members present publically, give media interviews, attend rallies and support a myriad of activities for the



public good. Many thanks to the task force members whose on the ground analysis inform our advocacy initiatives. Our understanding of the lived experience of those affected by government policy as well as task force members who have lived experience of poverty, significantly guides our work. Thanks also go to Public Interest Alberta's capable staff. We appreciate their contributions and support.

*Lori Sigurdson, Chair*

## Post-Secondary Education Task Force

**T**his year has been one of reflection and planning for the several stakeholders of the PSE Task Force. To address the on-going issues of access, affordability and quality in PSE in Alberta the task force is working towards implementing a province-wide advocacy campaign. This campaign will comprise a consultation process focused on building an alternative platform to the market oriented approaches to PSE currently being championed by the Progressive Conservatives. The PSE Task Force will work hard to make our campaign a central issue in Alberta's next general election.

Although the PCs increased the PSE budget in the 2014, it does not alleviate the 7.2% cut from last year's budget. The shortfall has and will continue to impact

the ability to provide programs and as a result reduce the quality of PSE in Alberta.

The advocacy work of Public Interest Alberta's PSE Task Force continues on five themes:

1. Create more quality spaces for students at Alberta's public universities, colleges and technical institutes;
2. Expand the number of faculty and staff in order to improve the quality of our public post-secondary education system;
3. Reduce tuition and restore cuts to student financial aid programs for students and their families;
4. Increase funding for graduate students at Alberta's universities; and
5. Support deferred maintenance and other infrastructure projects needed

for the expansion of the system.

As we move forward the work of the PSE Task Force will complement the current "Alberta Could..." campaign focused on advocating for a progressive income tax and fair corporate taxes as a way to fund PSE above and beyond current levels. Post-secondary education is the answer to how we may invest in the future of all Albertans resulting in a strong economy for generations to come.

The foundation of every campaign is planning and soon we will be ready to move towards the coordinating of resources and volunteers. See you all at the public rallies to advocate for affordable, accessible, and quality post-secondary education in the province of Alberta.

*Rod Loyola, Chair*

## Seniors Task Force

Our year kicked-off with a Grandparents' Day Rally at the Legislature on September 8th. Billed as the (UN)FAIR, it highlighted and mocked cuts to essential seniors' public services.

Over the previous summer, a sub-committee completed a draft of a Pharmacare Position Paper that was approved at a Seniors Task Force meeting in September and sent to the Minister of Health on September 28th with a request to meet.

In the fall and winter, we joined forces with Friends of Medicare and the Parkland Institute on a 12-community provincial tour focusing on "From Bad to Worse," Parkland's recent study of residential elder care in Alberta, illustrating the differences in quality of care in public, not-for-profit and private-for-profit facilities. The tour also highlighted the ways in which Alberta seniors were being targeted by the 2013 provincial budget cuts.

In January 2014, having received no response from Minister Horne, despite repeated calls to his office, the Seniors Task Force staged a sit-in in the Minister's constituency office. The focus of the sit-in

was on written assurance that Premier Redford had given while seeking the PC Party Leadership. She had promised to preserve the existing Seniors Drug Program and not implement the income-based Pharmaceutical Strategy for Seniors developed by former Minister of Health, Ron Liepert. Despite these assurances, the 2013 provincial budget had proposed an income-based drug program for seniors.

While the sit-in lasted less than 15 hours, it did generate two days of media coverage for the issue and resulted in the task force meeting with Minister Horne on February 13th. On March 5th 2014, two days before the 2014 Budget was introduced, Minister Horne stated in the Legislature that the government would



not be proceeding with the income-based seniors drug program announced in the 2013 budget.

The Seniors Task Force is currently working on the development of a position paper on long-term care. Through the development of clear, viable and solution-based statements on Home Care, Pharmaceuticals and Long-term Care, we hope to be in a position to advocate ways of addressing the many problems confronting Alberta seniors who require such services.

*Noel Somerville, Chair*

## Annual Advocacy Conference

Our eighth annual conference, "Reasserting the Public Good In a Corporatized World," was another great success. The keynote speaker, Dr. Vandana Shiva, gave a powerful and eloquent speech to 600 people in Calgary and 700 people in Edmonton. Her clear message about the need to reclaim the commons of food, water and democracy from corporate control inspired everyone to get involved in grassroots political action.

Alex Himelfarb, former Clerk of the Privy Council and author of the new book, "Tax is Not a Four Letter Word," gave a dynamic and compelling talk on revenue reform and the need to create a discussion about the country we want.

Plenary speaker Craig Holman, Government Affairs Lobbyist for Public Citizen in Washington D.C., also provided much food for thought on corporate financing of political campaigns and the need for reform of lobbying legislation.

The three plenary panels had



speakers from across the country speaking about: Challenging the Corporate Control of Education, Effective Ways to Stand Up to Corporate Power and Taking Action in Alberta: Next Steps. As in previous conferences, we had many excellent breakout sessions where conference participants were able to delve deeper into various topics led by our plenary

speakers and local leaders and activists. All of the plenary speakers and panels are posted on our website for those who may have missed the conference.

Overall the conference provides our members a chance to deepen their understanding of issues, meet and learn from other activists and organizational leaders and strategize on how to advocate

more effectively. A big thank you goes to our conference planning committee, PIA staff, the volunteers and our Calgary keynote and conference sponsors, particularly the Civic Services Union Local 52, and our four sponsor members, UNA, HSAA, ATA and AUPE.



## General Advocacy

In addition to the advocacy work of PIA's seven task forces, we are involved in a number of advocacy efforts, events and training.

### Privatization

One of the key themes that impact on all of our public interest issues is privatization. We had Allyson Pollock, one of the top experts on public private partnerships (P3s) and privatization from the UK, gave excellent talks in Calgary and Edmonton to sold out crowds in February. These events were followed by a day-long strategy session with member organizations to explore the various forms of privatization and what we can do to challenge it.

We also continued to work with our partner groups on challenging the P3 of the City of Edmonton's new LRT line. The Parkland Institute published an excellent report during the municipal election entitled "Wrong Turn: Is a P3 the best way to expand Edmonton's LRT?" by John Loxley. The OurLRT campaign conducted a poll of municipal candidates and helped inform them about the serious issues around using P3s for municipal infrastructure and

services. Since the election, we have continued to pressure City Council to make the process more transparent and address other key issues with the P3 process.

### Alberta Could...

Another key theme that affects the public interest is the Alberta government's refusal to address the need for tax reform. To that end, we have developed a new advocacy campaign called "Alberta Could" that calls on the Alberta government to replace the flat tax with a progressive income tax and to increase corporate taxes to the same rate as Saskatchewan. The campaign was launched on April 30th featuring a new website at [www.alberta-could.org](http://www.alberta-could.org) and a new poll by Environics. We held six public forums around the province and received significant media coverage. The campaign has also been receiving support from many partner organizations.

### Public Events and Outreach

A significant amount of time and effort also goes into supporting various events, rallies and meetings. Our Outreach Coordinator, Julie Hrdlicka was the

coordinator of the very successful teach-in called "Pros and Cons: Policies for People and the Planet" which took place during the federal Conservative Party policy convention at the end of October. This sold out event featured many dynamic speakers from across the country. We also continue to support First Nations Metis and Inuit efforts, including speaking at a conference in Slave Lake, at conventions and meetings of our member organizations and unions. We also attended and provided support for the Tar Sands Healing Walk.

### Training

PIA has been providing advocacy training for a variety of organizations including the Multicultural Coalition of Edmonton, a non-profit childcare network, the Early Onset Dementia Network, and a number of groups in the Northwest Territories. Public Interest Alberta is also an active supporter of the youth leadership program Next Up, sitting on the steering committee and providing communications and media training workshops.



## Statement of Operations

### Year Ended March 31, 2014

	2014	2013
<b>Revenue</b>		
Membership Fees	255,392	224,517
Campaign Income	50,795	36,704
Mobilizers	38,351	32,371
Conference Income	32,063	44,016
Calgary Outreach	18,000	0
General Advocacy Fund	15,000	10,270
Fundraising Income	10,655	11,075
Presentations & Awards	2,900	-
Speaker Honourarium	2,550	600
In-kind contributions	1,440	1,800
Interest Income	1,206	908
Better Way Alberta	0	455
	<b>428,352</b>	<b>362,716</b>
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>		
Staffing	215,340	206,271
Communications & Outreach	23,605	16,393
Rental	15,364	15,082
Amortization	5,594	5,738
Audit Fees	5,187	5,278
Telecommunications	4,166	4,204
Insurance	2,173	2,070
Annual General Meeting	1,700	1,147
Public Interest Award	1,480	14
Equipment/Programs	1,603	391
Janitorial	1,291	1,552
Stationery & Supplies	1,123	882
Board Meetings	1,091	741
Miscellaneous	565	465
Interest & Bank Charges	298	710
	<b>280,580</b>	<b>260,938</b>
<b>Program Costs</b>		
Mobilizers	38,351	32,371
Conference	33,826	46,178
Privatization Task Force	14,369	234
Seniors Task Force	13,533	3,217
General Advocacy Campaign	6,752	1,061
Environment Task Force	1,776	612
Human Services & Poverty Task Force	975	16,871
Childcare Task Force	729	4,095
Education Task Force	377	87
Post-Secondary Education Task Force	64	170
Democracy Task Force	0	57
Better Way Alberta	0	24
	<b>110,752</b>	<b>72,606</b>
<b>Excess of Revenues over Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 37,020</b>	<b>\$ (3,199)</b>

## Board of Directors

### 2013-2014

**Larry Booi, President & Chair**  
Individual

**Lori Sigurdson, Vice President**  
Alberta College of Social Workers

**Jonathan Teghtmeyer, Treasurer**  
Alberta Teachers' Association

**Bev Ray, Secretary**  
Canadian Union of Postal Workers

**Alex Shevalier, Director**  
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**Carol Wodak, Director**  
Seniors' Action and Liaison Team (SALT)

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Arusha Centre

**Guy Smith, Director**  
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**Heather Smith, Director**  
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