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Conference Report: CAUS AGM and Student Leaders' Orientation to Government

CAUS AGM

This trip was, in part, for the annual general meeting of the Council of Alberta University Students. Because provincial advocacy is such an important part of what we do as a Students' Union, this was a great opportunity to meet with the other universities who we advocate alongside and discuss the direction we are taking for the upcoming year in more detail.

Student Leaders' Orientation to Government

Held on an annual basis, this conference is an invitation from Campus Alberta to discuss elements of advanced education and meet with the Minister of Advanced Education. As all parties involved have rather busy schedules, this is a unique opportunity to discuss the direction that both parties want to move in and foster an open and welcoming relationship for the year to come.

Monday June 24

Bailey Harray and myself traveled up to Edmonton, where both events were being held, the previous day as we had a relatively early start on the Monday. CAUS AGM started off at 9:30am and covered multiple important issues. For new business, we approved the annual budget that CAUS will be operating within for the coming year. Additionally, we approved the investment and operational reserve amendments which reduced some unnecessary stipulations within the existing policy. A Policy Committee was also discussed as there were multiple policies worth updating as identified by last years' delegates. Some questions were raised around the makeup and direction of this committee and further information was spread to be discussed at a later meeting. Finally, a Counterparts Planning Committee was struck up to handle the upcoming CAUS Counterparts conference in about a month. As this was the last item on the agenda, the meeting was adjourned shortly after. We grabbed some lunch following the meeting and headed over to Edmonton's Government House for the first part of the Student Leaders' Orientation to Government. Some presentations were given around legislation and governance, the role of students associations, some opportunities to engage, and student supports and outcomes. After these presentations we were lucky enough to have the floor opened up for a question period with the Minister of Advanced Education, Demetrios Nicolaides. Some of the highlights involved overviews for the upcoming year with regards to provincial post-secondary funding, free speech, effectiveness of tax grants vs. up front grants, and International student tuition. Overall, it was a great experience and we were all thankful for the insightful and meaningful answers provided by the Minister. Following the discussion, CAUS hosted an MLA mixer. This was a great opportunity to get to know more MLAs on a more casual basis.

Tuesday June 25

The following day started early off at 8:30am in the Government House once again. Our first order of business was around the topic of red tape reduction. The floor was open in the beginning for different institutions to identify what they see as red tape hindering their students' operations on the campus. Multiple areas were identified by several groups, including the student application process, transfer credit clarity, applications for student aid, international student work permits (in addition to study permits), and the Comprehensive Institutional Plan. The session was relatively positive with multiple people from the government providing clarity, feedback, and even considering some of the suggestions brought up. The next presentation was around international education in Alberta. This covered many things such as the critical importance of it within Alberta's post secondary educational system and the priorities identified moving forward. At this point, the session was cut a little short to allow time for lunch. Bailey and I had to leave the Government House for the Legislative building as we were invited by the Minister to attend question period. This was a great opportunity and a unique chance to see closer into the workings of the provincial government. After question period, we were lucky enough to have a more personal meeting with Nathan Neudorf – the MLA for Lethbridge East. This was a critical meeting to establish a closer working relationship and held high promise for open and clear communication throughout the year to come. After the meeting Bailey and I headed back home to Lethbridge.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Best regards,

Andrew Gammack
President