

Gladys Blackmore responses

Candidate for Grande Prairie City Council

Privatization, including P3s:

AUPE members know very well that privatization regularly fails to find “efficiencies” and any cost savings are often off the backs of workers who become de unionized, with lower pay and benefits.

They also work on the front lines of service delivery and see the problems caused by high-turnover low wage private providers, and the bureaucratic burden caused by having to deal with a third party instead of an in-house provider.

1. Will you oppose privatization of municipal services and infrastructure, including Public-Private Partnerships aka P3s? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house?

I feel that some P3 partnerships can work very well, and provide funding that would otherwise not be available. A good example of this would be affordable housing. Mixed-income rentals, where some units are subsidized and others rent at market value, provide a good neighbourhood environment for people of all income levels.

However, there are many P3 partnerships that are not supportable. Policing is a good example. I believe every P3 partnership must be carefully evaluated for potential strengths and weaknesses, and in my experience, most do not provide benefits or opportunities which are not better met by in-house services.

Municipalities as employers:

As our economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, good jobs are an important factor. Public sector workers spend in their communities, and many households impacted by private sector recessions have been able to keep the bills paid thanks to a stable public sector job.

2. Will you support your employees and your community by ensuring the municipality employs staff with living wages, full-time hours where desired, job security, and collective bargaining rights?

I fully support providing employees with living wages, full-time hours, collective bargaining and job security. I believe this to be integral throughout our society, and not restricted to municipal employees.

3. Will you oppose attempts from the provincial government to legislate against municipal staff including cuts to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, or restrictions on their right to strike?

I oppose cuts to pension plans, and restrictions on employees outside of essential services to strike. I am not opposed to essential services taking other job actions to defend their employment issues, provided those actions do not jeopardize the general public.

Funding:

For decades the trend on public services has been cuts and defunding, with fees downloaded onto workers, and the tax burden shifted away from the wealthy and corporations to the working class. At the same time, workers in the public sector know that tax freezes and cuts mean cuts to services and jobs. Any promise political candidates make can only be realized through proper revenues.

4. How do you propose your municipality deal with funding shortfalls, cuts, and downloading of responsibilities from federal and provincial governments? Do you favour spending cuts over tax increases?

I have always spoken out against upper levels of governments' propensity to download cost to municipal governments as they attempt to provide a falsely positive economic outlook. I will continue to speak out when I see this happening.

When there are funding shortfalls and cuts are necessary, it is important to find the least painful response possible to all citizens. There is a limit to both tax increases and cuts to services, so it is important to find the most palatable balance between the two. I have always looked for creative solutions and careful fiscal management to handle spending shortfalls, both in my previous time on council and in my many years managing non profit organizations.

COVID-19 Safety:

With the negligent provincial response to now three preventable waves of COVID-19, municipalities have been put in an awkward position of needing to take measures to protect their citizens throughout the pandemic. Many are introducing measures of their own, but not all have.

5. Do you support measures such as mask mandates, vaccine "passports", and vaccine mandates for staff to limit and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your municipality?

I fully support health measures such as mask mandates, vaccine passports and vaccine mandates. I believe that, whether you support vaccine measures or not, every decision results in consequences. I have chosen to be vaccinated, even knowing this does not ensure that I am fully protected from Covid. My neighbour has chosen not to be vaccinated, and I have pointed out to him that he may be restricted from public places, perhaps even from employment opportunities, and he has to accept those consequences as the lesser of what he sees as two evils.

Affordability:

With workers squeezed by increasing costs, municipal fees add to the burden. Service fees are a form of flat tax that require the same payment from a CEO as a low income worker.

Transit affordability is an important piece of working class equity. Fees add an extra burden for many people who can not afford the costs of private transportation in the first place. The reduced emissions on increasing transit ridership can also be a part of how cities take positive action on climate change.

6. Do you support measures to reduce municipal reliance on services fees and fares, such as eliminating transit fares?

I believe that with forethought and planning, it is possible to reduce municipal reliance on fees and fares to services used by low and middle income users. I make that distinction, because there are many service fees attached to building permits and commercial development which should not be restricted or eliminated.

Recreation and public transit are already very subsidized by municipal government, and the amount collected from users is really not significant to the overall budget of the city. They are, however, very significant to the overall budget of the user.