

Amarjeet Sohi

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 believe good quality, public-sector jobs are crucial to our city's economy and our ability to provide quality services to the public. I oppose the privatization of public jobs providing core services, period. Privatization and contracting out does little to create savings over the long term, degrades the quality of services, and only succeeds in creating lower paying, less stable jobs. I support keeping public infrastructure public as well.

I believe public and private services can interface with one another to provide coverage and options across systems. Transportation is a good example, where the City provides core services like roadways, bike infrastructure and transit, and private providers can create more specialized services, like rideshare, e-scooters and taxis, all of which give residents more options. But I believe strongly that those public services should be held in the hands of the public sector.

I am committed to reversing the recent privatization of ATU Local 569 bus cleaning jobs and I will review other areas that have been privatized and options the City may have to bring them back in house as well.

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?

Yes, to all of the above. Quality public service jobs are essential to our economy and to providing good service and outcomes for taxpayers. I want City employees to be empowered in their roles, to take on work with the community, rather than bringing in outside contractors. That means the City as an employer must provide stability, healthy workplaces and supports for 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 am committed to standing up for municipal employees, which includes

protecting hard-earned pensions and most definitely their Charter-protected right to strike. I was a municipal employee for years as a bus driver with ETS. I'm also proud to say I was an activist with ATU Local 569, where I helped organized DATS drivers into the union. They enjoy better pay, benefits and pensions to this day because of it. I'm not shy to say my time in the union, and the well-paying job it ensured I had, was a big reason I was able to blossom and succeed as a new immigrant to this great city. I will not forget this should I be elected Mayor on October 18th.

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?

There are a number of steps we can take to keep a good balance between maintaining our public services and affordable taxes. First, I will bring my experience as an MP and federal minister to bear to seek out funding for Edmonton from the provincial and federal government. We must push back against responsibilities being downloaded to municipalities, because municipalities have the fewest number of tools available to them to raise revenues.

On that note, I will also advocate to the provincial government to return a greater share of the 30% education tax they levy as part of property taxes. That money has been used for general revenue for many years, but Edmontonians aren't seeing value for those contributions from the province, and that needs to change.

I believe there are efficiencies to be found in the City of Edmonton as an organization, but we shouldn't look to find those efficiencies on the backs of workers - rather, on processes where there may be duplication or extra managerial positions.

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?

Yes, I strongly support these measures, and if I am elected Mayor, I will work with Council to uphold and implement them. When the provincial government fails to act, municipalities must step in to ensure we are taking the actions that will keep people safe and healthy.

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?

Affordability in user fees is crucial for access. As a young immigrant, I arrived in this city with little to my name, but free or affordable options for transit, recreation, libraries and parks were essential to my quality of life. These services are conduits to social mobility.

If I am elected Mayor, I will work to keep user fees affordable and explore more ways to make user fees affordable for seniors, newcomers, youth, and low-income individuals and families.