

MUNFA Provincial Party Leaders Questionnaire: *Provincial Election 2021*

Q1. As the only degree-granting institution in our province, Memorial University plays a central role in all aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador's social, economic, and cultural development. Memorial prepares students for their future roles by developing capacities that can be applied in a range of situations, while fostering the skills necessary to be engaged citizens and adapt to our changing society. Furthermore, investments in post-secondary education pay dividends to the province in a multitude of ways. It is important that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, especially our political leaders, understand the distinct role of a public university and the value it provides to the province socially, culturally, and economically.

How does your party view the role of Memorial University in the social, political, cultural, and economic life of NL? What will your party do to strengthen this role?

Q2. Memorial University has a special obligation to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but its ability to keep this promise is increasingly compromised by cuts in provincial funding. Since 2015, Memorial University has seen successive cuts to its operating grant with the most recent provincial budget confirming that forecasted cuts to funding for Memorial University would be implemented, as previously announced. The University has seen an increase in precarious employment and fewer permanent faculty and support staff positions, with an inevitable erosion of Memorial's ability to continue offering high-quality programs to the students of this province. While fiscal challenges can create political pressure to cut government spending, investment in education is widely recognized as one of the most effective economic multipliers. Education levels within a society are also linked to socioeconomic stability, equality and to improvements in public health. In short, access to high quality post-secondary education brings very significant individual and societal benefits.

Public post-secondary education and research are critical for a successful transition to a post-COVID, post-fossil fuel economy. Will your party commit to increased investments in core operating funding for Memorial to support quality research and education?

Q3. Memorial University is key to the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. Facing an aging, declining population, investments in post-secondary education are one of our province's best immigration strategies. Despite this, years of budget cuts to Memorial University have severely impacted our academic mission of delivering high quality education. We need public post-secondary education that is both accessible and of high quality in order continue attracting and retaining young people to our province.

How will your party work to maintain a system of accessible post-secondary education that continues as a key driver for immigration to Newfoundland and Labrador, while ensuring Memorial University's ability to meet its academic mission of delivering high quality education?

Q4. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the landscape of our world, our country, and our province in the span of months. Like all post-secondary institutions in Canada, Memorial University was forced to make dramatic changes to our day-to-day operations while working to reduce impact on students' educational opportunities. The pandemic has compounded the effects of many pre-existing problems that Memorial has faced due to sustained budget cuts over recent years, such as an overreliance on precarious workers in the face of reduced faculty complement in many academic units, cuts to academic support staff in many units, and an eroding physical plant.

How will your party work with the Federal Government to support post-secondary education in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether by leveraging COVID-19 recovery opportunities or otherwise?

Q5. Students, faculty, and staff at Memorial work and study in significantly aging infrastructure. In the absence of adequate funding, Memorial applies band-aid solutions to occupational health and safety concerns. Long-term neglect of existing infrastructure is putting the physical and mental health of many students and employees at risk, and many facilities are no longer fit for their designated teaching and research purposes. Direct investments by the provincial government to address deferred maintenance at Memorial ended effective the 2015-16 fiscal year.

What will your party do to address the deferred maintenance, repair and renewal needs of Memorial University?

Q6. Canadian universities traditionally practice collegial (shared) governance without political or private sector interference. Collegial governance means that students, faculty, staff, and administrators share in key decision-making processes. The Canadian Association of University Teachers ranks Memorial University at the bottom among Canadian universities for practices of shared/collegial governance. Memorial is the only university in Canada with no faculty representation on its governing board, putting the Memorial University Act out of sync with widely accepted standards of collegial governance.

What will your party do in its commitment to improving the collegial governance and autonomy of Memorial University?

Q7. The Province's over-reliance on the fossil fuel industry combined with the cost of the Muskrat Falls project has pushed our province into a state of great uncertainty even as the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many pre-existing problems here. These include a lack of accessible childcare, the vulnerability of workers in minimum wage jobs with inadequate security and benefits, and the difficulty of accessing primary health care in many rural and Northern NL communities.

What will your party do to make Newfoundland and Labrador the kind of inclusive and equitable society that will make our province the kind of place where graduates of PSE can imagine settling?