



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

April 5, 2019

Failure to invest in post-secondary education puts Manitoba's future in jeopardy

First published by the Winnipeg Free Press, April 4, 2019.

At a time when other jurisdictions are finding ways to invest in post-secondary education (PSE) and healthcare, the Manitoba government is doing the opposite, effectively making higher education out of reach for those who need it most. Manitoba raised the cap on PSE tuition increases to 5% plus inflation – as a result students across the province are seeing tuition increases of upwards of 6.6% this September– and public funding to PSE is shrinking – students are subsidizing more of the cost of education. It's truly disappointing to see this government's lack of awareness toward the value of post-secondary education and what it can do to give Manitobans a better future.

Affordable and accessible education is a sound investment and priority for economic development. The training and professionalization of our future workers are what will keep our province's economy dynamic and competitive for generations to come. By keeping the cost of education relatively low we provide an incentive for young people to stay in Manitoba and grow our population and economy. However the tuition rebate for students who study and remain in Manitoba was one of the first incentives chopped by the PC government when it took power and the \$52 million cut was not

reinvested in post-secondary education. The Manitoba government, when faced with this criticism, points out they have put money into the Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative (MSBI). The MSBI is limited financial aid, non-repayable grants, scholarships and bursaries, to help some students offset the cost of tuition. But for most it changes nothing – only 21% of Manitoba PSE students access MSBI, and many not based on economic need. Moreover, some of these funds go unclaimed. This is a Band-Aid response.

Manitoba's relatively affordable tuition was not only a benefit to Manitobans, but it also serves to attract thousands of students from all around the world. The economic, cultural and social contributions of international students must not go unappreciated. Indeed the government seems to acknowledge these benefits in theory; Minister of Education and Training Kelvin Goertzen recently declared 2019 the Year of International Education in Manitoba. Yet March 2018 surely was not a year for international students- that was when the government suddenly clawed back public health care for international students without any prior consultation. The \$3.1 million saved by this elimination seems petty when a recent press release from Minister Goertzen put their annual contribution to the local economy at over \$400 million.

there is an alternative.

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Consistently the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) hears the same story on the ground: international students chose to come to Manitoba because tuition was relatively low and made even more affordable through incentives such as having healthcare included. For those who arrived recently will see tuition fees nearly double: for example at an international student at Brandon University is paying \$11,426.07 this year for tuition (more than three times a domestic student) and by the end of the 4-year degree this will increase to \$20,105.91 annually. This combined with the sudden loss of public healthcare feels like a betrayal.

Canadians consistently applaud themselves on public health care in contrast to our neighbours to the south. No one should have to choose between seeking medical attention and going further in debt. However this is not the first time the Manitoba government's commitment to accessible public healthcare has been eroded – witness the closure of emergency and urgent care services with more on the way.

In a recent meeting with Minister of Education and Training Kelvin Goertzen, student leaders in attendance were offered a folksy anecdote about how “back in the day” his tuition was paid for by working a summer job. Statements like these make it quite evident that this government's perception of issues faced by students in 2019 is limited. Funding one's studies through seasonal employment may have been possible prior to 1992 when drastic funding cuts to Canadian universities quadrupled tuition across the country over the following two decades. These substantially higher tuition fees combined with the ever-increasing cost-of-living in urban centres makes supporting oneself through summer employment a ludicrous suggestion. Most students today work all year long, sometimes numerous jobs, and still struggle to afford their tuition, textbooks, course fees and all of the other necessities of life. The average student debt upon graduation in Canada is \$26,000 according to Statistics Canada. Mr.

Goertzen had the luxury of avoiding going into debt to get his degree, but anecdotes such as these are of little comfort to those of us today who will live the next decade in the red thanks in part to the actions of this provincial government.

History will judge the provincial government for their lack of vision for post-secondary education in Manitoba. Students and civil society will organize in response. Our governments should recall the 2012 Quebec student strikes. It didn't start overnight, it started after years of attacks on public universities and lead to the defeat of the austerity-driven Quebec government at the time. There is still time for this government to rethink its approach to the critical issue of post-secondary education.

Education is a central societal pillar that has long-term benefits. It's now more important than ever for us to maintain the vision of a society that prioritizes investing in the success of our youth. But by neglecting our post-secondary institutions, the provincial government is neglecting the future, choosing instead to score short-term political points through balancing the budget and reducing taxes on the backs of those trying to succeed in today's competitive labour market.

Dele Ojewole is the Manitoba Chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students. The Canadian Federation of Students-Manitoba is a democratic non-profit organization uniting over 45,000 post-secondary students in the province.

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