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Federation of Post Secondary Educators of BC

Presentation to:
CAMPUS 2020: Thinking Ahead

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Submitted by:
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Speaking Notes for
Jan Mastromatteo, President
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to
Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead

Good evening and welcome to snowy Prince George.

I'm here representing the faculty at the College of New Caledonia and I would like to focus my presentation on the issues of access, sustainability and the maintenance of comprehensive programming in the public post-secondary system in BC.

Before I elaborate on these issues I would like to take a minute to tell you a little about the College of New Caledonia. We have been in Prince George since 1969 and today we also have campuses in Quesnel, Mackenzie, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof and Valemont. This year CNC will serve approximately, 5000 students although this number has been in decline since reaching a high of 5800 in 2001-2002. Our College has long prided itself on being the most comprehensive institution in the region and our program offerings include Trades, Developmental Education, Technologies, Health Sciences, Social Services, Business, and University Credit in both Arts and Science. CNC is integral to meeting the education, training, as well as the economic and social planning needs of our communities. Our college is also looking ahead, specifically in the development of partnerships. Our recent partnership with Thompson Rivers University is one example of how CNC is working to build new choices for students.

Unfortunately, because of inadequate funding and skyrocketing tuition fees both our programs and our students have been declining in number since 2001. I would commend you on providing a vehicle for long term planning in the post-secondary sector. Education is a rare form of social programming in that it pays for itself and these profits can only be enhanced by insightfully planning the future. However I would like to draw on some formidable changes in our recent past that have placed restrictions upon student access, and sustaining comprehensive program choices.

The policy and funding choices made by the current government in its first four years in office have put an enormous financial burden on our students. At the same time, the government has allowed real per-student funding to our institutions to fall. This has produced "institutional whip-lash" across the public post-secondary education system. As real per student funding has declined, program options and course offerings have been reduced. With the dramatic increases in tuition fees, students have been forced to leave, because they can't afford to continue or take on massive debt just to complete their programs. In short, students are paying more while access is getting more difficult.

On the question of real declines in per-student funding, in 2001, the government's operating grants to public post-secondary institutions averaged \$8,920. per-student. By 2005/06, those 2001 dollars had dropped to \$7,930 per-student. Even using current dollars, we saw per-student funding decline over that period. It went from \$8,920 in 2001 to \$8,625 in 205/06.

How that chronic underfunding played out at other institutions varies, but I can tell you that at the College of New Caledonia it has meant a drop in enrolment, the loss of both programs and courses, and the layoff of fifty full time faculty since 2002. The cuts at CNC began with developmental programs like the cancellation of the VALT and IBT programs, but the cuts have left no area untouched. Most significant, given the current skill shortage across the labour force, and particularly in the Trades and Technological areas: we have seen the suspension of all of CNC's technology programs, save one, since 2002. We have lost Electronics, Engineering Design Technology, Wood Manufacturing, Wood Technology, Computer Information Systems and this year Geographic Informations Systems. Our one remaining technology program, is Forestry. We have also seen significant faculty layoffs and cuts to University Credit programs, Business, and even the Trades. In our regional areas we have lost a Home Support and Resident Care Attendant program (Vanderhoof) and the Social Service Worker program (Quesnel). We have even lost our 3rd year Nursing programming despite the shortage of nurses in the labour force.

In fact, that same phenomenon describes the disconnect between the provincial government's fiscal and policy choices in post-secondary education and the needs of our broader provincial economy. We've know for some time that we are facing a skills shortage. We also know that one of the most effective ways to deal with the shortage is to increase access to post-secondary education.

What has happened, unfortunately, has only undermined efforts to address the skills shortage since both access and the critical need for comprehensive programming in the Colleges has been eroded. We've made post-secondary education far more expensive for students and chronically under-funded the institutions that were set up to deliver the very skills we know our province will need. And here in North Central BC, what has happened will lead to an inability to meet the training and educational needs demanded by the growing demand for economic diversification.

The critical question remains one of funding. Without adequate funding of our public post-secondary education system, we cannot fulfill the training and education mandates that colleges like CNC were established to meet.

As educators, it is our hope that the recommendations which will come from Thinking Ahead, your Campus 2020 initiative, will focus upon addressing the funding shortfall in order to address the innovative solutions you seek.

I would add to this argument by noting that post-secondary education and training strengthens equality across our communities as well. Fair and properly funded access to post-secondary education and training means citizens have the opportunity to advance themselves, a provision that certainly benefits the individual, but also the community at large.

1. 2005 ON TUITION FEES AND FUNDING: (source CFS)

In the early to mid-1990's , the federal government made massive cuts to post-secondary education transfer payments to the provinces. Most provinces passed on the cost of these cuts to students in the form of higher tuition fees. By 2003, a wide variety of research had established that increasing fees were creating declining rates of participation in post-secondary education among low and middle income Canadians. In 1999, Statistics Canada reported the first decline in these participation rates since it began tracking post-secondary enrollment in 1965.

While some provinces have moved to freeze or decrease tuition fees in order to retain a minimum level of access for low and middle income earners: for example Manitoba, where fees were reduced by 10% in 2000-01 and were at \$3,272 for 2005-06, Quebec where tuition fees are the lowest in Canada and where fees have been frozen for 15 of the last 20 years, College is free, tuition averaged \$1,900 in 2005-06, Newfoundland and Labrador where fees have been reduced over the past four years and frozen before that since 1999, even in Ontario a two year tuition fee freeze was instituted in 2004 and the government has instituted an increase to core funding to offset the cost of the freeze, and in Alberta, where fees have continued to increase, the increases are now being paid for by government. Yet, in BC where tuitions were frozen between 1996 & 2002, we have seen the sharpest rise in the country since 2002.

At the same time, although real wages have not increased for decades in Canada, our national tuition fee average has gone from \$2,023 in 1993-94 to 4,214 in 2005-06. Here in BC, the average tuition has increased from \$2,240 in 93-94 to \$4,874 in 2005-06. (CFS) and much more, in specific program areas.

2. Student Loans and Grants:

Students coming from low and middle income families have not found relief from higher tuitions and student services fees from federal nor provincial loan and grant frameworks. "Canada remains one of only two member nations in the OECD without a system of needs-based grants, yet saddles its students with some of the highest fees. We have to look no further than the rising student debt on loans: As a result of

funding cuts, students completing a four year degree faced, on average a \$25,000 debt in 2005 and projected to 2009 the average debt will be over \$30,000. We know that individuals with post-secondary education of all types will more than double the repayment of the costs for not only loans but the entire costs of their post-secondary education within 5 years of graduation through their taxes as productive members of the Canadian workforce.

I have had an opportunity to read some of the research pieces that appear on the Campus 2020 website. Although, we are still in the early days of public hearings and recommendations to this committee, I am very concerned that some of the background material supports a pse system that would continue and even, increase, the social “tiering” effects that I have tried to focus upon. Do you want to create a system where B+ and better students have access to a funded university system? What about other students, those with under B+ averages coming out of high school and those trying to return and/or receive retraining? Are you intending to create a second class system for “second class” British Columbians, those who have not come from families of substantial means or for many reasons, do not have the grades required to get into a BC University?

I teach at a College, CNC, that has seen massive downsizing and elimination and reduction of programming since 2002, programs that would, otherwise be meeting the increasing needs of the ‘skill shortage’ and in a cost efficient way, since students would not have to travel to other parts of the province or other provinces in order to find the education programs they require. Since 2002, the College of New Caledonia, here in Prince George has eliminated fundamental programs such as VALT and IBT, all but one of its Technologies programs, programs that were and would have continued to meet the labour market needs of employers in the technology sector. Since 2002, we have lost our Electronics program, our Engineering Design Technology program, our Computer Information Systems program, our Wood Technology and our Wood Manufacturing Programs, and our Geographic Information Systems program. We have only one of our technology programs left, Forestry, and even this has been downsized despite the support for this and the other technology that has come from

employers and former graduates. Although the administration and the College Board have heard numerous presentations from faculty, former students, and employers, CNC still decided to cut these programs.

Since 2002, we have lost approximately, 50 full time faculty to layoffs. Our full time faculty numbers have dropped from 230 in 2001 to under 180 in 2006. In addition, although CNC is the central post-secondary institution able to meet the comprehensive needs in our region, we have also lost, our Home Care Support program in Vanderhoof, the Social Service Worker program in Quesnel, as well as seeing significant layoff numbers in the Trades as well as our University Credit area. CNC offered the only university credit programming in our region until the opening of UNBC under the Social Credit government. Because of its roots, UNBC continues to be an institution primarily mandated to offer career programming (i.e. social work, education, business, forestry, nursing, and now through UBC, medical faculties). As a consequence of its history, CNC university transfer programs have far more diverse offerings and transfer arrangements in the academic disciplines than UNBC. The College has recently signed a partnership agreement with Thompson Rivers University for a 2year+2year option for our university students, yet, the cutbacks have put in jeopardy our ability to offer the necessary courses for the first two years of university studies.

I appeal to you to keep in mind that CNC offers a diverse range of options for students, it is the only comprehensive post-secondary institution in the north and it needs sufficient provincial funding in order to continue to offer both programming to meet the skills gap, which we realize exists across the labour market and not just in the Trades areas, in the short term and a thoroughgoing range of programming in order to meet the needs of citizens in our region on both a short term and a long term basis.

CAUT: recent Paying the Price publication: student fees today makeup more than 34% of total university operation revenues, up from 13% in 1980. At the same time, public operating grants have fallen from 80% to 59% today.(historically, the share of revenues deriving from core operating grants provided by government rose from 57% in 1961 to 84% by 1980, an obvious recognition on the part of government in the need to invest in post-secondary education.), yet this understanding seems to fallen away- very unfortunate given the trends in the labour

market. More and more the labour market demands post-secondary education as a prerequisite to employment. For example the average yearly earnings of college graduates climbed from \$29,961 in 1995 to 32,736 in 2000. And this is prior to the skill shortage.

Our faculty association has joined the ranks of our provincial organization, FPSE as well as our federal partners like CAUT in long supporting through policy statements, indicating that any person who is qualified and interested in pursuing a post-secondary education should be able to do so regardless of their ability to pay, with the ultimate goal of eliminating tuition. (as is the case in many of the OECD countries).

This consumerist attitude, making pse a commodity in the search for a credential to work has eroded and undermined the value of education in improving our quality of life and our contributions, as individuals to our communities and to our nation. ie. A forthcoming report on the increase in student cheating and plagiarism in universities and colleges in Canada, where one conclusion is that faculty are not getting institutional support for the actions they want to take when they find students cheating or plagiarizing reported on October 1, on Sunday Morning, CBC radio – by author Julia Christensen-Hughes on her forthcoming publication “cheating to win” to be published next month