



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

October 14, 2016

Keep Post-Secondary Education Tuition Legislation

First published on the CBC website Oct 14, 2016

Post-secondary education is a public good that all Manitobans value and should have access to. Unfortunately, Premier Pallister, when asked about protecting affordability for Manitoba students, has said that he doesn't "want to dismiss the possibility" of changing tuition policy. Currently, domestic, undergraduate tuition is tied to the rate of inflation. It is protected under legislation called 'The Protecting Affordability for University Students Act'. Manitoba has the third lowest tuition fee levels in the country because of students fighting for the right to access and afford post-secondary, as well as a willingness on the part of the previous NDP government to listen to students' concerns.

Under the previous government, a number of measures were enacted that made post-secondary education more accessible and affordable for Manitoban students. Tuition was frozen from 2000-2008, the Manitoba Bursary program was created, funding for operational grants increased for post-secondary institutions, and interest was eliminated on provincial student loans. While these measures did not provide universal access to education, they were important steps on the path toward affordable, accessible, quality post-secondary education in this province.

In 2012, Bill 2, the 'Protecting Affordability for University Students Act', was passed.

The act allows universities to raise tuition fees at the rate of inflation. If an institution raises tuition past this cap, their provincial funding will be reduced accordingly. The legislation only covers domestic university students, leaving out college, professional program, graduate and international students. At the time of its introduction, the Canadian Federation of Students – Manitoba, called for more robust measures that included all students. We renew that call today and further ask for a heightened level of protection for the legislation itself.

During the provincial election, members of the Progressive Conservative party made comments during public debates, including one hosted at the University of Manitoba, indicating the potential to bring tuition levels to that of the national average. The national average is \$6,191. That would be a \$2,261 increase from 2015-2016 average Manitoba tuition. So how would the new government be able to do this? First, it would have to eliminate the Affordability Act from provincial legislation.

Even with measures such as the Affordability Act, Manitoban

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students are still struggling to afford to pursue post-secondary education. Due to stagnating wages and minimal summer job opportunities for prospective and current students, people from a lower socio-economic background, with no financial support, are reliant on student loans. The proliferation of student loans has resulted in the average undergraduate student incurring approximately \$19,000 in public debt. This figure does not include those who must access private lenders or the use of credit cards because public access to these numbers is restricted due to privacy laws.

The pursuit of post-secondary education, whether through a college or university program, is no longer a choice but a necessity. Over 70 percent of jobs require post-secondary credentials. We call on the provincial government to stay committed to keeping life affordable for Manitoba families by protecting the Affordability Act and expanding it to include all students. The answer to addressing the provincial deficit is not burdening our future generation with massive personal debt loads and jeopardizing their future. We must invest in our future and our economy through opening doors to college and university, not closing them. By investing in an educated workforce you will help to reduce spending in other areas, such as health care or justice, while at the same time ensuring productive and engaged citizens of tomorrow.

We cannot jeopardize the future of our province by making education more inaccessible. Education is not a luxury item. Education must be preserved and protected. Never forget that the students of today are the workers of tomorrow. We must stand with these Manitobans: when we do, we invest in our future.

*Michael Barkman is Chairperson for the Canadian Federation of Students – Manitoba and **Brianne Goertzen** is the Manitoba Organizer with the Canadian Federation of Students.*

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