



CANADA

Debates of the Senate

3rd SESSION

• 40th PARLIAMENT

• VOLUME 147

• NUMBER 62

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Budget Restraints at Colleges and Universities

Enrolment Levels of First Nations and Inuit Students

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

BUDGET RESTRAINTS AT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the most recent statistics from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada indicate that university enrolment increased by almost four per cent, or 32,000 full-time students, over fall 2009. With an increasing number of young people going on to post-secondary education, universities and colleges across Canada are facing growing financial and physical constraints. Although I recognize the government's investments in infrastructure, Canadian colleges and universities continue to lack financial, physical and human resources.

Can the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us whether her government recognizes the increasing operational needs of universities and whether the government will undertake to provide more support to post-secondary education in its next budget?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, we absolutely do. Our government provided \$800 million more for post-secondary education through the Canada Social Transfer, up 40 per cent from the previous government which cut \$25 billion in transfers to the provinces, including student funding. Through the Canada Student Grants Program, we have made more money available in grants which students do not have to pay back. This means more access and less student debt to repay in the future. We are providing \$250 a month to low-income students and \$100 a month to middle-income students. Close to 280,000 students benefited in the last school year, 140,000 more than under the old system.

[Translation]

ENROLMENT LEVELS OF FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT STUDENTS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the Aboriginal population is growing six

times faster than the non-Aboriginal population. Yet, Aboriginal peoples remain underrepresented in post-secondary institutions because of a lack of financial resources.

According to the Canadian Federation of Students, one of the ways to counter this disproportion is to eliminate the cap on increases in the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and ensure that all Aboriginal post-secondary learners receive the funding required to continue post-secondary education.

What will the government do to ensure better representation of First Nations and Inuit students at Canadian universities and colleges?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I appreciate the honourable senator's question, because it gives me an opportunity to put on the record what the government has done. This government has shown many times over that it is committed to improving First Nations education and that it is working in partnership with the provinces, territories and First Nations to do so.

Minister Duncan has said that the government will engage in a new approach to provide support to First Nations and Inuit post-secondary students. It will be an effective and accountable program and coordinated with other federal student support programs. We will work with Aboriginal organizations as we move forward.

Since 2006, when we came into government, we have invested approximately \$714 million resulting in the completion of nearly 100 school projects and over 100 school projects are currently under way.

As the honourable senator well knows, Minister Strahl, Minister Prentice and now Minister Duncan have all been working closely and collaboratively with the Provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, and with regional First Nations on initiatives to improve education outcomes for students.

I appreciate the opportunity to state this, honourable senators. I think people neither fully appreciate nor understand all the good work the government has done and the commitment it has to improving education for Aboriginal peoples.