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## Post-secondary education an investment for the future

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In the 21st century, a highly educated populace is a country's ultimate "resource."

Post-secondary education and skills training lead to a more efficient and effective workforce, and also lead to productivity advances through the commercialization of ideas and innovations. In an increasingly globalized and interdependent knowledge-based economy, it is the countries and nations who awake and respond most quickly to this reality that will reap its economic and social rewards.

In a recent paper called "Canada's Success Is No Accident, And It Isn't A Given," Kevin Lynch, the current Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, declared that "increasing Canadian productivity growth" and "improving our human capital through education and training" are two of the three most important public-policy challenges facing Canada today. Yet while Canada has done well on both the productivity and human capital fronts, it continues to lag in comparison to most of its major trading partners and comparable nations, especially the United States. There is a productivity and human capital gap in Canada, and it continues to widen.

### EDUCATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

There are many reasons why a post-secondary education is important, not the least of which is the personal reward and fulfilment that it provides to the recipient. But here is another reason, as stated by Lynch: "OECD estimates suggest that adding one year to the average educational attainment in a country can increase its GDP per capita by five per cent." That is a staggering percentage, one unlikely to be achieved through any other productivity driver. The formula for Canada's future success is therefore really quite simple: Education equals productivity, and productivity equals prosperity.

### ACTION NEEDED

If Canada wishes to remain a significant competitor in the global economy, it must move quickly in implementing public policy aimed at increasing our productivity and post-secondary attainment rates.

Furthermore, both provincial and federal governments must support that public policy. The effect of a post-secondary education is no longer just provincial, if indeed it ever was.

The Government of Canada has played an important role in the advancement of post-secondary education in Canada, particularly in the areas of student loans, scholarships and bursaries, the indirect costs of research, and the federal granting councils. This support must continue.

In fact, it must grow. Canadian post-secondary institutions have become globally competitive because of federal spending, and yet there is still a long way to go. New paradigms are being created. The race is on, and we do not have the luxury of letting levels of government sit one out.

## MIND AN AMAZING RESOURCE

Let us for a moment imagine a future map of Canada. This map will not be dotted with roads and railroads. Rather, it will be covered with highways of information, streams of knowledge that criss-cross the nation, intersect in large hubs, and swell into giant clusters. These hubs and clusters will be Canadian cities and regions, filled with universities, colleges, art schools, technical institutes, laboratories and research centres. In each of those institutions will be the resource that dictates the prosperity, success and fulfilment of future generations: The human mind.

In the same way, then, that the building of ports and terminals in the 19th and 20th centuries allowed Canadians to maximize their natural capital, so too will the physical infrastructure of tomorrow allow them to maximize the new world's greatest commodity: Ideas.

Seeing matters in this light, it becomes easier to understand not only why we must begin to invest now, but also why all levels of government must be involved. If we wish to keep up with the other nations of the world, nations who are rapidly educating their own citizens and building their own maps of tomorrow, we must employ every resource in the cause. We must embrace the knowledge frontier with the same courage, fortitude and entrepreneurial spirit that emboldened the founders of this grand experiment called Canada. To approach this issue slowly, or parochially, is to ensure that our future is one of global pretender, rather than one of global player.

Claudette Tardif, PhD, is an educator who was appointed to the Senate in 2005 by Prime Minister Paul Martin