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## POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

### Inquiry—Debate Continued

Speech by:

The Honourable Vivienne Poy

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

## THE SENATE

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

#### INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Hubley, calling the attention of the Senate to questions concerning post-secondary education in Canada.  
—(Honourable Senator Tardif)

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, this inquiry stands in the name of Senator Tardif, and Senator Cowan will be speaking on this inquiry following my remarks today. Thereafter, I would request that the inquiry continue to stand in the name of Senator Tardif following Senator Cowan's remarks.

**The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*:** Is that agreed, honourable senators?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Poy:** Honourable senators, I rise today to speak on Senator Hubley's inquiry on post-secondary education, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the release of the Special Senate Report on Post-Secondary Education. As Senator Hubley has emphasized, many of the issues and concerns highlighted by that committee a decade ago are still relevant today, from what we have heard from the post-secondary students who visited many of our offices over the past few months.

Post-secondary education is a priority because it is fundamentally linked to Canada's future. There are three interconnected issues on which I would like to speak. They are affordability, attracting international students and developing research capacity.

In March 2007, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, CMEC, an intergovernmental body founded in 1967 by the ministers of education from all provinces and territories which deals with pan-Canadian education issues, wrote to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, the Honourable Monte Solberg, indicating that post-secondary education is at a critical juncture. In that letter, the council claimed that federal cash transfers for post-secondary education are lower today than they were in 1994-95.

During the last decade, as funding declined, we have also seen a steady increase in student enrolment in post-secondary education. As Senator Hubley stressed, post-secondary education has become a requirement for employment in the workplace. The result is that the institutions are stretched to their capacity and beyond, students are mired in debt, and the cost of tuition is climbing exponentially. This situation is not sustainable.

I do not want to suggest that the picture is entirely bleak. Since the late 1990s, there has been some reinvestment in education, most notably the creation of the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the funding for the 21st century Chairs for Research Excellence.

These two very successful initiatives did much to spur innovation in our universities and attracted top researchers to Canada.

In addition, the Millennium Scholarship Foundation provided support for needy students. The endowment for the foundation was set to expire by the end of next year, and I am happy to note that the Canada Student Grant Program has been announced in Budget 2008 to replace this funding.

However, despite the renewed investment, the essential finding of the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada in its 2007 report is unchanged that Canada is less affordable than all 11 European countries except Italy and the United Kingdom. The report also found that, as post-secondary education has become less affordable, the burden of the cost of education has shifted steadily on to the shoulders of parents and their children. I am sure that if one was to ask any student in Canada they would say that they are graduating with a mountain of debt as they enter the workforce.

Although federal funding is increasing for post-secondary education, the amount is not dedicated to post-secondary education and there is no way to ensure that funding intended for post-secondary education is not diverted to other provincial priorities. If post-secondary education is to be a priority, its federal transfer must be dedicated funding with accountability built into the system.

Another avenue for increasing the revenues of post-secondary institutions is that of international students. Indeed, international students can do much more than provide a source of additional revenues through their differential tuitions; they also help to build long-term links to other global institutions and provide Canadian-born students with an opportunity to learn from other cultural perspectives.

As a result of the benefits to be gained from internationalizing campuses, there has been a worldwide effort to attract international students. Unfortunately, Canada has fallen behind the U.S., the U.K., Australia, France and Germany in the number of international students it attracts.

Ten years ago, the report of the Special Senate Committee on Post-Secondary Education recommended that Canada create a national strategy to attract international students. Regrettably, Canada did not develop such a strategy. Australia, which has made a major effort in this regard over the last decade, now has more international students per capita than the U.S. We are lagging behind in this area and that is a great loss to our students, institutions and economy, which can only benefit from attracting the best and brightest from around the world.

Finally, perhaps the most important reason that we must focus on post-secondary education is that the entrepreneurial nations of the world have moved beyond dependence on natural resources to emphasize innovation and build international knowledge economies. Canada has fallen far behind. For Canadians to be referred to as “Mexicans with sweaters” in the book by Andrea Mandel-Campbell, *Why Mexicans Don't Drink Molson*, is very disturbing.

Honourable senators, our colleges and universities are research centres that will spur our competitive advantage. They train our labour force and are breeding grounds for innovation.

Consider the case of Jim Balsillie, the chairman and co-CEO at Research In Motion and a graduate from a commerce program at the University of Toronto. He invented the BlackBerry, which many cannot do without. His vision has changed the way we do business and conduct our daily lives. Incidentally, Mike Lazaridis, president and co-CEO of Research In Motion, illustrates the need to attract the best and brightest from around the world. He came to Canada from Turkey and studied at the University of Waterloo. Needless to say, he has made a great contribution to this country and the world. Together, they have built one of the most successful Canadian international corporations.

In a time when innovation is most needed to tackle our global problems, higher education is the most important key to our future as a nation. Honourable senators, I do not see enough of a long-term, sustained commitment to research in universities. We need a strategy to spur innovation and that is why I support the call of the Canadian Council on Learning for a national framework to set goals and measure progress.

The recent report of the Conference Board of Canada ranks Canada's performance in innovation at 14 out of 17 OECD countries. In terms of research and development investment, we rate twelfth among those same countries. In fact, our rates of investment in R&D have actually declined between 2001 and 2005.

Honourable senators, post-secondary education is the tool that Canada can use to transform our society and to help meet future challenges. We cannot afford the luxury of being complacent with our abundant, though non-renewable, natural resources. We live in a competitive world and the knowledge economy is our future.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier said in 1902:

No, this is not a time for deliberation, this is a time for action. The flood-tide is upon us that leads on to fortune, if we let it pass, it may never recur again. . . .

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