



Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

Standing Committee on Finance (Pre-Budget Submission) September 2011

Amplifying our Potential



Thank you Mr. Chair. On behalf of our membership of 26 post secondary student associations across Canada, representing over 300,000 students we would like to thank you and the members of the committee for inviting CASA here today.

Rob and I are here today to present to you 3 reasonable, affordable, and necessary investments that the government of Canada can make, with high returns, to improve the lives of Canadians. I am sure around this table there is no disagreement that accessing and persisting in education will contribute to a more prosperous and engaged citizenry.

The discussion around Canada's aging population is prominent in the media, in scholarly articles and around the dinner table. Canadians are aware that our aging population will cause strain on our social services and labour force in the years to come. Increasing numbers of Canadians retiring means labour shortages will become an economic trend. We need to ensure that the education and training opportunities are available now – so we can continue to prosper in the face of our future challenges.

The realistic investments that the government of Canada can make to help address the education needs of the country, but also the future demands of our economy are to include a vehicle exemption in the CSLP assessment, removing the 2% cap on all AANDC funding, and amend the copyright act to remove the parallel importation regulations.

Vehicle Exemption:

Canadian students' needs are dynamic and ever changing- the standards for assessing needs today do not reflect those of a decade ago. Today, many students, particularly those in suburban and rural areas, need a vehicle to go between their home, class, and jobs every day. Unfortunately public transit is often inadequate, so a dependable vehicle is fundamental to their participation. A low of 31% of students in Atlantic Canada and a high of 49% in British Columbia rely on a vehicle to attend school.

The current vehicle exemption is \$5000.00 – despite the medium advertised price of a used vehicle in Ontario being \$11,400.00. Given the changing realities for many students we ask that the Federal Government exempt a single vehicle from the CSLP assessment of borrowers assets.

Increasing access for First Nation and Inuit Students

Canada's Aboriginal peoples face persistent inequalities in educational outcomes due to chronic underfunding of programs and services.

Between 1971 and 2001, Canada's Aboriginal population grew 322% compared to 37% in the non-aboriginal population. Further, a large proportion of the Aboriginal populace is now of school-age: 45% of First Nations are under the age of 25, while a quarter are under age 15. These numbers highlight the importance this demographic will play in ensuring Canada has the labor force to grow and be competitive in the future.

CASA recommends that the federal government lift the 2% cap on spending to AANDCs Post Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and ensure that the program is supported with the appropriate program delivery budget. Our estimates suggest that the government would need to initially invest \$424 million with an escalator fixed to eligible enrollment and costs.

Allow Parallel Importation of Academic Materials

No Canadian student should carry the burden of unaffordable university textbooks.

These regulations force retail booksellers to buy at an inflated price, they also prevent domestic booksellers from finding price efficiencies through competition.

If these regulations were eliminated, it would save close to \$30 million annually for students alone². As a matter of perspective, the most recent reduction in the GST by 1 percentage point saved students \$3.75 million on textbooks. These savings do not include further savings through competition by breaking the federal government-endorsed monopoly of exclusive book resellers.

CASA recommends that Bill C-32 be amended to eliminate section 27.1 prohibiting the parallel importation of books from foreign distributors.

In closing, let me emphasize the importance of increasing the percentage of people pursuing post-secondary education in this country.

By 2025, the number of persons retiring from the labor force will exceed newcomers by 34%. To continue funding health and social services, we need to substantially increase the value of our workforce.

The federal government cut investments in education in the mid-90's to help reduce a deficit. Due to these cuts, Canada faced a brain drain as researchers and graduates left to find opportunities elsewhere.

If we want to invest in ourselves and invest in the future solutions to our challenges, this committee will invest in education as a cornerstone to amplifying our human infrastructure and strengthen Canada's economic position.

Thank you.