

VISION ACTION BAILLIE

May 8, 2017

Anna Dubinski
Canadian Federation of Students, Maritimes Office
via email: a.dubinski@cfs-fcee.ca

Dear Ms. Dubinski,

I am pleased to respond to your questionnaire on post-secondary education issues as follows:

1. Tuition Fees

At an average of \$7,218 per year for an undergraduate program, tuition fees in Nova Scotia are the second highest and fastest rising in Canada. High tuition fees have left many Nova Scotian families unable to afford a university education, and have caused student debt to skyrocket to an average of \$39,600 for an undergraduate degree. Numbers released by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission reveal that over the last decade the number of Nova Scotians pursuing a post-secondary education in Nova Scotia has declined by 10%.

Will your party commit to reducing tuition fees? What will this plan look like?

Jamie Ballie and the Nova Scotia PC party is presenting an optimistic, pro-growth agenda that focuses on rebuilding our province, creating jobs and getting Nova Scotians back to work. Voters are tired of governments with no vision that only focus on cuts. We want to make Nova Scotia an easier place to earn a quality education and to make our province more attractive to newcomers. We will enter into a new Memorandum of Understanding with our universities so we can get tuition back down to the national average. One part of that plan will include helping young Nova Scotians stay in the province and find work by replacing the Graduate Retention Rebate that was cancelled by the Liberal government.

2. Core Funding

Throughout the 1990s, government funding for post-secondary education was drastically reduced resulting in massive tuition fee increases, larger class sizes, fewer professors, and an increased reliance on part-time contract instructors. In 2013, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found that Nova Scotia's income tax gain from post-secondary degree holders offset public costs in 12.6 years. This financial justification is not to outweigh the social benefit of a highly-educated population, which include higher levels of civic engagement, lower dependency on the public health care system, and a more efficient labour force.

What is your party's plan for increasing funding to core operating budgets for colleges and universities?

The long-neglected issue of core funding for universities is an important one. Since the election was called within days of the latest budget, it is difficult to know with certainty what is the true financial situation with the provincial government. In this environment, it would be unwise to commit to specific increases over the next four years. However, Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives want to be fair and honest partners with the university community as we rebuild our province. We will encourage universities to minimize their administrative costs and direct as many resources as possible to programming that benefits students. We believe post-secondary education is a priority for future investments.

3. Needs-Based Grants

Students need financial assistance programs that meet three criteria: provide adequate levels of financial support to students who need it the most, when they need it the most; are easy for students and their families to access and understand; and combat the long-term impacts of rising student debt levels in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Student Grants program, introduced in 2008, exemplifies these criteria.

Will your party commit to increasing the portion of student assistance received in non-repayable, up-front grants?

As already noted, we want to make Nova Scotia an easier place to earn a quality education and to make our province more attractive to newcomers. Part of that plan will include entering into a new Memorandum of Understanding with our universities so we can get tuition back down to the national average. We will also help young Nova Scotians stay in the province and find work by replacing the Graduate Retention Rebate that was cancelled by the Liberal government.

4. Employment Support and Income Assistance

In 2000, the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act was amended by regulation 67 so that recipients of income assistance could no longer apply for student loans. This shortsighted policy change has shut out many qualified Nova Scotians from pursuing a university degree, particularly single parents, whose costs of raising a family while in university cannot be covered by a student loan alone.

A 2013 study in British Columbia found that by allowing those receiving income assistance to access student loans, the provincial government actually saved money in the long term, as most students were able to find gainful employment upon graduation.

The CareerSeek program is supposed to alleviate the barriers created by regulation 67; however, only seven individuals have enrolled in the program in the past four years. This is compared to the 1600 students on income assistance prior to 2000.

Will your party commit to repealing regulation 67 of the Employment Support and Income Assistance Act to ensure that persons in need are not denied assistance simply because they are students?

The issue of accessing student loans for those receiving income assistance certainly bears further study. If successful on May 30th we would be willing to sit down with partners such as the Canadian Federation of Students to discuss the impact of potential changing regulation 67.

5. Stakeholder Participation

With university Presidents looking out for their individual institutions, the current structure of the MOU Partnership Board cannot broadly evaluate the post-secondary education system in Nova Scotia. Students, faculty, and staff are invested in ensuring that the system is sustainable and maintains its high reputation worldwide. The same is true on the institutional level, where, even with substantial cuts in funding, senior administrative salaries have ballooned over the past ten years. Without the power to ensure that university funding is used for core services, students are placed in a vulnerable position.

Will your party commit to putting students, faculty, and staff on the next MOU Partnership Board? Will your party sponsor legislation to increase the power of these groups on university boards?

For any agreement to be meaningful it must involve all of the parties affected by the agreement and contributing to the implementation of the agreement. While the university presidents and government ministers act as signing officers for their organizations we would expect participants such as CFS-NS to be part of the process of developing the next memorandum of understanding.

6. Gender-Based Violence

Rape culture is pervasive on Nova Scotia's campuses, with one in five women experiencing sexual assault at some point during her studies, and the majority of sexual assaults taking place in the first eight weeks of classes. For over 20 years, students have been organizing to prevent sexualized violence and protect survivors on campus, but the lack of standalone sexual assault policies and recent high-profile incidents, such as the St. Mary's rape chants and the Dalhousie Dentistry "Gentlemen's Club," prove that institutions are not motivated to take action.

Will your party commit to working with students to implement provincial legislation to combat sexualized and gender-based violence on campus?

Too many victims of sexual crimes have lost confidence in Nova Scotia's legal system. We must act to ensure the legal system is fair and responsive to survivors of sexual violence. A Jamie Baillie government will protect post-secondary students by requiring colleges and universities to develop sexual violence policies and provide supports for students affected by sexual violence. In addition, we will pass the Dignity for Victims of Sexual Violence Act that ensures survivors of sexual violence are treated with respect by the legal system and enshrines the right of victims to legal representation. If elected on May 30th, a PC government will begin to restore confidence in the system by requiring provincial court judges to complete comprehensive and ongoing education about sexual assault laws.

7. MSI for International Students

International students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of the province's universities and colleges. In addition to the contributions to our campus communities, there is a significant economic benefit to international students studying in Nova Scotia. In 2014, international students spent \$324 million in our province, which resulted in 3,328 new jobs and \$142 million in wages. International students are a critical component of our economy. A 2009 report commissioned for the government of Nova Scotia found that "the cost to Nova Scotia of providing Medical Services Insurance to those international students that have obtained MSI eligibility is

less than \$90 per student per year". Offering MSI as another benefit to studying in Nova Scotia would benefit both students and the economy.

Will your party commit to eliminating the deferral period which prevents international students from immediately accessing Medical Services Insurance?

Jamie Baillie and the Nova Scotia PCs recognize we need to do more to welcome newcomers. The issue of deferral periods applied to insurance benefits for international students is complex and would require further analysis.

Other actions we would undertake include working with local businesses to expand the Provincial Nominee Program and partner with Ottawa to increase the number of skilled immigrants coming to our province.

8. Youth Employment

Students in Nova Scotia are graduating into one of the weakest labour markets for youth in Canada. In 2016, there were 2,600 fewer youth employed than in 2015. This number fails to capture the number of missing youth jobs that Nova Scotia has yet to recover since the financial crisis in 2008. When population decrease is taken into account, in 2016 Nova Scotia had 4,200 less jobs for youth than before the recession.

At times of high youth unemployment, students are especially vulnerable to exploitation in the workforce. High competition for work means that students are forced to take on multiple, precarious, part time jobs. Increasingly students are also forced to work unpaid internships, sometimes even paying to work for free in the hopes of developing experience that will lead to paid work.

a. Will your party commit to extending regulations currently applied to Federal sectors, restricting the use of unpaid internships outside of workplace integrated learning programs, in all workplaces in Nova Scotia?

Creating jobs will be the top priority of a Jamie Baillie government. Our goal is to put 10,000 Nova Scotians to work rebuilding our province. We will invest in crumbling roads, bridges and buildings. We will make living in Nova Scotia more affordable. More Nova Scotians will find meaningful work here at home. A part of this commitment to creating jobs will include ensuring that the work environment and its regulations help to protect workers from unfair practices while maintaining a competitive marketplace.

b. Will your party commit to eliminating the inexperienced minimum wage in Nova Scotia?

We want to ensure that government policies support both hard-working Nova Scotians and the entrepreneurs who employ them. A PC government would work with business to examine the inexperienced minimum wage and make balanced changes that are fair to workers and business owners.

9. Fixed Election Dates

Engaging students in electoral politics should be a top priority for all political parties. One of the best ways to ensure this happens is to have elections take place when a majority of students are on campus. Post-secondary institutions can serve as hubs for students to receive education materials on how to vote

and even have early access to on-campus polling stations. Election dates can be guaranteed in Nova Scotia by adopting fixed election dates that make sure polling day is in mid to late October. Fixed election dates will also guarantee that provincial elections do not overlap with municipal or federal votes, thereby helping prevent voter fatigue. Considering that Nova Scotia is the only province in Canada without fixed election dates, this is a long overdue reform to our province's electoral system.

Does your party support fixed election dates?

Jamie Baillie is committed to creating a long-term plan that Nova Scotia needs to finally move ahead. To be effective, we also need strong accountability measures. That means a Premier who answer to the people of Nova Scotia. To back up what we say, a new Progressive Conservative government will put in place strong accountability measures that you can count on to get the job done. This will include establishing fixed election dates within our first six months in office.

Sincerely,



Janet Fryday Dorey
Campaign Co-Chair
PC Party of Nova Scotia