

Guest Editorial: Will Post Secondary Education be an Issue?

Guest opinion featured in the Guardian, September 12th.

The fear of student debt continues to be a significant deterrent for students entering post-secondary education. Moreover, this same student debt continues to be a primary factor causing our young, educated citizens to leave in search of higher-paying jobs. Both of these consequences result in adverse economic effects to our province. Present and past governments have largely ignored this problem – and have allowed students to unjustly bear the burden.

As President of the UPEI Student Union, it is my position that all Islanders deserve the right to post-secondary education, irrespective of their financial means or condition. It is also my position that allowing the present scenario to continue, whereby our highly-educated young people are one of our largest exports, is not desirable to the long-term economic well-being of our province. For our economy to continue with its diversification and healthy growth, a plan is necessary to keep our educated students working within the Province.

The recent education policy released by the Liberal Party is interesting. Their policy outlines a plan to "establish a tax relief program for graduating PEI university or college students who return to or remain in this province." It is refreshing to see a party willing to provide a specific solution to these problems which plague many students.

On Wednesday in Kinkora, Premier Binns outlined his Party's post secondary education policy. Its focus was on specific capital improvement projects, many of which have been developed in cooperation with the federal and municipal governments over the years. I was happy to again hear about these projects, but was left concerned that their plan did not address the serious problems facing Island students nor gave students a hope for the future.

The Liberals are making and effort to address the debt concerns of our graduates. The challenge now, it would seem, is for the other political parties to come forward with specific policy alternatives. How would they now propose to keep our Island graduates working here on P.E.I. while addressing a leading cause of their flight?

Then, and only then, can a meaningful debate take place among Island students, whereby a consensus can be reached on the best approach for the

future. The Leaders have the opportunity before them to solve these post-secondary education issues, and if they prove successful in their task, Prince Edward Island could herald the future of debt-relief and forward thinking for all of Canada.

As a student, I challenge our political leaders to help us work towards a better tomorrow.

Sincerely,
Brandon MacKenzie,
President UPEI Student Union

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