

Jensen says Scholarship fund a "political carrot"

Is the millennium fund a fraud?

BY TODD MACLEAN

Many believe that the federal government's large investment of 2.5 billion dollars into the Millennium Scholarship Fund may just be an easy way out of providing annual support for post secondary education.

Beginning in the year 2000, roughly 100,000 scholarships (averaging \$3000 a year) will be awarded annually to full and part time students for ten years. This marks the "single largest investment ever made by a federal government to support access to post-secondary education for all Canadians."

Blaine Jensen, representative of UPEI's Student Development, contends that one apparent problem with the fund is that this money has yet to even be allocated.

"There's no money in it yet -- it is based on funds that have yet to be committed from the federal budget," said Jensen.

Jensen is very skeptical of the Millennium Fund for this reason, along with several others. He is also concerned that the federal government will require an entirely new assessment process to determine who will receive the scholarships, one separate from the student loans assessments.

"They are planning to base their assessments on both merit and need," Jensen said. "How do they judge the two of them at the same time? It could turn out to be a huge bureaucratic process in order for students to access it."

Another downfall is that the government could be accused of digging themselves a deeper hole with this process. Even though some students will benefit greatly from the program, universities will still have to suffer through annual cutbacks from federal funding, which means increased poverty for those students who are not chosen for the scholar-

ships.

"They're not stemming the tide of rising tuition," explained Jensen. "This program encourages universities to raise their tuition fees, which places more people in a position where they need more money to go to school. In a way it is actually reducing access to university."

This creates quite a paradox, as the main objective behind the strategy is "to make the knowledge and skills Canadians will need for better jobs and a better standard of living in the 21st century more accessible and more affordable," as the information pamphlet says.

"This investment in the future of our country is the result of our successful battle against the deficit. It is an investment that will pay for itself over and over again in the years ahead," said Finance Minister Paul Martin in his 1998 budget speech.

But 2.5 billion dollars

invested on a long term basis is a relatively small federal investment in itself, and is simply a "one time payment" as Jensen says.

"I think the government

should be reinvesting this money directly into the funding of education," he said. "I just hope this isn't an abandonment of higher education by the government."

Natives demand for apology from House of Commons

BY ERYN FAGAN

The alleged leak of a private letter by the Department of Indian Affairs has led to accusations, anger and demands for an apology last month in the House of Commons.

Bruce Starlight, band member of the Tsuu T'ila reserve in Alberta, wrote to Minister Jane Stewart complaining of financial corruption in the band administration. The letter, allegedly marked with the minister's stamp, somehow fell into the hands of Chief Ray Whitney, who is now suing Starlight for libel. An internal investigation into these events is ongoing.

The Reform Party's Indian Affairs critic, Mike Scott, has been persistently outspoken about the handling of Indian issues and has accused the department of leaking the letter. Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board and member of the First Nations Resource Council, Chief Whitney ran as a Liberal in an election and is a colleague of PM Jean Chretien.

The Opposition spent six straight days interrogating the Minister in the Commons. On February 10th, Stewart stated, "I have to ask what the motivation is of this opposition. I guess it puts me in mind of a com-

ment made by a political forebear of mine, Sir Wilfred Laurier, who said it is easy to raise prejudices. I believe this is why we are on--"

This remark was immediately interrupted by an angry outcry for an apology.

"I must tell this minister that I lived on a reserve, I taught on a reserve, and I raised five Indian foster children in my home," shouted Reform leader Deborah Grey.

"It is our motivation to help grassroots aboriginal people who trusted to go to her in confidence."

Also enraged was John Duncan, whose wife and children are status Indians.

"When the minister accuses us of being motivated by prejudice, she is insulting me and my family," Duncan said.

Reform leader Preston Manning, in defence of his party's recommended cuts to the department, added that, "We do not believe that a fraction of the money . . . ever gets to grassroots aboriginal people."

In response to demands, Stewart finally said, "I was just trying to reflect the facts as I see them. If I have hurt them so severely, I would be glad to apologize."

The fray has attracted media attention across the country.



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