

Business leaders to head millennium fund

BY DAVID COCHRANE

OTTAWA (CUP) — The appointment of a prominent businessman to head the board of directors of the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation has student groups worried about the direction of Ottawa's \$2.5-billion scholarship fund.

Yves Landry, chairman and CEO of Chrysler Canada, was appointed to head the foundation by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien on February 24. Landry, at times an outspoken critic of Canada's post-secondary education system, has called for a "revolution" in higher education to better prepare students for the job market.

Landry, who is a member of a number of organizations intent on building closer ties between corporations and higher education, has warned that certain areas, such as the auto industry, face a serious shortage of skilled workers that could limit growth. He has also criticized governments for not pumping more money into programs with high-demand in the job market.

Despite those comments, Landry says he is bringing an open mind to his role as chair of the foundation and won't pursue a particular agenda.

"I'm only one member of the board and my job is to be a facilitator," Landry told the Toronto Star recently. "I'm not going to make policy right now."

But while the prime minister is hailing Landry as a great friend of education, student groups are questioning the appointment of a wealthy business leader to head up a fund for needy students.

"It begs the question: What does this person know about student poverty and student debt?" Brad Lavigne, national chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, said.

The foundation will start operating in 2000 and run dry

in just 10 years. It will spend about \$325-million on annual scholarships for 100,000 students. The scholarships will be worth as much as \$3,000 per student annually.

Right now, the government says the scholarships will be awarded to students on the basis of financial need and academic merit. The federation and most education groups have advocated that scholarships be awarded solely to low- and moderate-income students. But Lavigne says Landry's strong business ties makes that unlikely.

"It doesn't offer much hope that an individual such as Mr. Landry will be sympathetic to the overwhelming need for the needs-based criteria," Lavigne said.

The foundation will be run by a 15-member board of directors made up of private citizens. It will include one student.

The federation and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations both say more students should be on the board. Lavigne says he wants to see a cross-section of graduate, undergraduate, and full- and part-time students selected by federation membership.

Hoops Harrison, national director of the association, says he doesn't want to "quibble"

with the federation over which students sit on the board. If the number of student seats isn't increased, Harrison says it should be filled by an "average" student who isn't an active member of either national student group.

"I want a person that's mixing their macaroni and tuna for dinner and have no idea what kind of job they will get after university," Harrison said.

Landry's appointment and the lone student-designated seat has both student groups worried the foundation's board of directors could

become dominated by business interests.

"We won't stand for that," Harrison said. "We would tell the government that that would not be an appropriate committee for the millennium fund."

Harrison says the board should be filled primarily by

members of the education community, including a cross-section of students, professors, administrators and financial aid officers.

Lavigne suggests a similar structure, though with more emphasis on students and less involvement by business community, particularly at the helm.

"Putting someone from corporate Canada in charge of [the millennium fund] would not be an option [for us]," Lavigne said.

The government says it will finalize the fund's scholarship criteria and the structure of its board of directors over the next two years.

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