

National News in Brief

Students worry projected deficit in Nova Scotia will jeopardize education spending

By **ANDREW SIMPSON**

HALIFAX (CUP)--Students in Nova Scotia are worried the province will renege on its promise to inject \$23.8 million into universities now that it is projecting a \$82-million deficit.

In a first-quarter budget report released earlier this month, the minority Liberal government revealed they would not achieve their objective of a \$1.2-million surplus, instead expecting to fall \$82-million in the red.

Already, students say funding increases to education should not be sacrificed to balance the books.

Just before the deficit was announced, the province promised it would pour much-needed cash into Nova Scotia's 11 universities over the next three years, replacing funding that has previously been cut.

While failing to deliver on a balanced budget may be a political liability for the Liberals in the legislature, cutting social spending would risk public support, says Jessica Squires, Nova Scotia representative for the Canadian Federation of Students.

But Education Minister Robbie Harrison says all the concern is over nothing and the government is committed to the \$23.8-million increase.

He says the significance of a small deficit -- which he attributes to unforeseen factors like the poor dollar and an over-run in health spending -- has been overblown.

Scuffle heightens concerns about pepper spray

By **MARY VALLIS**

VICTORIA (CUP) -- A recent scuffle between a group of homeless people and their dogs and local law enforcers has heightened concerns about the use of pepper spray by authorities.

Municipal bylaw enforcers used pepper spray earlier this month during a scuffle with about 20 homeless people and their dogs over the impoundment of one of the dogs in the city's Centennial Square.

The incident began when two enforcement officers found about five dogs to be in violation of city bylaws, says Miles Drew, chief bylaw enforcement officer of the Capital Regional District.

When one of the officers moved in to impound one of the dogs, a man attacked a police officer from behind, Drew says. One of the officers then drew his pepper spray as he was "swarmed" by the group, spraying them slightly in self-defense.

The scuffle has raised concerns about whether the enforcement officers are targeting the homeless and whether they should be carrying pepper spray.

Drew says the bylaw enforcement officers carry pepper spray to defend themselves against potentially harmful animals.

But others wonder whether by doing so, homeless people and their dogs are the ones being put at risk.

After the recent incident, Victoria Mayor Bob Cross spoke in favor of making downtown a "dog-free zone," but denied allegations the plan targets the homeless.

Sandra Fleck, a street outreach worker, says Cross is on a campaign to flush the homeless out of the downtown core.

Cross' dog ban suggestion follows a long list of new bylaws, including one that gives officers the right to ticket anyone "sitting, kneeling or lying" on the street.

Fleck says she will pursue charges against the officers through the B.C. Civil Liberties Association.

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