

Common Sense or Necessity?

Dear Editor,

Re: “Degree of common sense” Calgary Herald Editorial page A9, June 1, 2013. You align yourself in agreement with the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education (EAE) statement that “a very generous” increase in post-secondary funding in Alberta at 45.9% over the past ten years is somehow a justification for cutting post-secondary funding by close to 10%, relative to what was promised by the Government of Alberta, a year ago. What you and the Ministry fail to explain is that, from 2001/02 to 2010/11, the ten-year period for which data are currently available from Statistics Canada, post-secondary enrollment in Alberta increased from 128,574 students to 188,607 students, or 46.7%. Thus, the Government’s largesse has not quite kept pace with enrollment growth, and now a 10% cut is meted out, to “meet the needs” of a still growing number of post-secondary students in Alberta.

Of course, as well, the operating grant growth noted above, and lauded by your newspaper and the Government of Alberta, ignores that the Statistics Canada consumer price index has increased by 21.4% over the same time period as I identify above. So, rather than princely increases in funding, the Alberta post-secondary system has actually seen a real cut in funding by over a fifth. Let’s not let a couple of (inconvenient) simple facts get in the way of belief, after all.

In your editorial, you also extol the virtues of reducing grass cutting, power use, computer replacement and snow removal as ways to “(peer) in the corners”, so that post-secondary administrators can “(sharpen) their pencils”, now that they are receiving something less than the “whopping” \$2B in operating funding to run the post-secondary system. On the other hand, however, the total Alberta budget is \$40B, so the \$147M cut in post-secondary funding, while having a devastating effect on that sector, and the futures of all Albertans, will do little to balance the Government’s \$2B deficit this year. In fact, it only takes a couple of post-secondary users to slip, break an arm or leg, owing to inadequate snow removal, for these false economies to be exposed for exactly that.

The bulk of post-secondary expenditures are on salaries and benefits of academic staff, and these are *not* out of line with national norms, if one actually takes the time to study the Statistics Canada data on this matter. Cutting academic staff numbers is the only way to “peer in the corners” to find savings of the magnitude this Government would apparently like to see. However, that will mean a lot less spaces for prospective students, no matter how one wishes to dress it up.

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June 2, 2013.*