

**TO:** SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES  
**FROM:** KATHERINE BONELL,  
PRESIDENT, COLLEGE OF THE ROCKIES FACULTY ASSOCIATION  
**SUBJECT:** SPEAKING NOTES: INCREASED FUNDING FOR PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY  
EDUCATION  
**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 30, 2008

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Good morning and welcome to the Ktunaxa Territory and to the Cranbrook community. My name is Kathy Bonell and I am here this morning representing the College of the Rockies Faculty Association. I would like to thank you for taking the time to solicit community input on the 2009 provincial budget.

For those of you who might not be familiar with the College of the Rockies, it is a community college that consists of seven campuses throughout the East Kootenay region - with one campus in Fernie, Invermere, Kimberley, Golden, and Creston, and two campuses in Cranbrook. The college provides programs and services to over 2,000 students that are studying on either a full or a part-time basis. The College reported over 1 million contact hours in the 2007/2008 academic year, which is a significant number for a small community college like ours.

Each campus offers a number of programs that reflect the needs and interests of students in their respective part of the region. Aboriginal Studies, Adult Basic Education, Transitions, Criminology, Child, Youth and Family Studies, Nursing, Welding, Plumbing, Mechanics, Carpentry, University Transfer, Certified Dental Assisting, Mountain Adventure Tourism, Human Kinetics, Tourism Management, Hairdressing, English Language Training, Office Administration, Business Administration, Computers, and Fine Arts, are just a few of the program areas students can select from.

Learning at the College of the Rockies occurs through a number of different mediums; for example, faculty teach in and facilitate bridging programs, dual credit programs, preceptorships, practicums, distance online courses, apprenticeship programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, cored programming, video conferencing, and more. We have relationships with students and communities throughout this province, other provinces, and abroad. While a significant number of programs are completed at each campus, not all programs are site specific. My point here is that like so many colleges, teaching universities, and universities throughout the province, we work hard to meet the needs of students, businesses, and industry, but reaching out and serving students requires money.

As an instructor at the College of the Rockies for the last 20 years, I, like so many of my colleagues teaching in other disciplines, have witnessed the benefits of public post-secondary education. Public post-secondary education includes certification, but it also results in heightened self-esteem, better wages, and better living conditions for individuals and families. When one person in a family has a formal education beyond high school, it sets the stage for family members in the next generation to do the same. Our province reaps the benefit of public post-secondary education, not just from the generations that are attending colleges and universities now but also from the generations yet to come. Post-secondary education has a positive impact on the province's economy, but it also has a positive impact on the social functioning of communities. I know that I am not telling you anything that you haven't heard before, but the core purpose of a community college is under attack.

The 2.6% reduction in provincial funding has placed this college and its campuses into an internal competition. For the first time in years, the College of the Rockies has a deficit budget and it projects a deficit budget for the next three years. The College has made it very clear to faculty, to students, and to families in this region that it will not, in this current fiscal environment, continue to operate programs in the manner that we are accustomed to. Even programs that are successful and fully subscribed are subject to a reduction if the money is needed to develop new programs or to operate some other aspect of the College system.

I would like to give you a few specific examples of our current situation. This financial pressure has resulted in:

- The reduction of services in the Transitions Program from 25 hours of contact time per week per student to 12.5 hours of contact time per week per student. This is a program that is designed specifically for adults with cognitive disabilities and it is a program that has been a cornerstone program for this region and for the College of the Rockies for over 20 years.
- The closure of the College's licensed preschool which has provided services to children and families in Cranbrook and the surrounding area for a little under 30 years.
- The cancellation of some University Transfer courses and the collapsing of others, such as the French language courses which now requires students registered in first and second year studies to take their coursework together.
- Students taking a University Studies psychology course in a non-University Studies program area.

The reduction in provincial funding makes it difficult for us to build trust with students because students are not guaranteed that the courses and programs they register in will

actually be offered at the beginning of the term. This year, a number of students that registered in university transfer courses were told that the courses they registered in weren't going to be offered. In order to re-direct limited funds, the College has implemented a "10 students or less" cancellation practice. This means that if fewer than 10 students register in a course or program and the course or program is not required for a certificate or a diploma, then it is at risk. It also means that students can no longer trust that the course or program they register in will run, even if they move to Cranbrook or to one of the other campuses to take it.

Long-standing programs are not the only programs at risk. Students in the Plumbing program this year were told a few days before the start date that the program was going to be postponed until January. This occurred after students had already made plans to participate in the program. It was only because a parent pleaded with the College that this program's start date was re-instated. The Faculty Association is concerned that without adequate funding other programs that serve this community and the East Kootenay region will be fragmented and/or disappear. And, we are concerned about who gets to decide who is more and less valued as a student when these decisions are made.

I know this government is concerned about balanced budgets, but this province can afford to fund public post-secondary education. Not every student and family can afford to move to another part of the province to get access to coursework, or even afford to pay for a course in their home community with the current fee structure. We need your support and we need adequate funding from the province to continue to sustain the programs we have; to re-instate the courses and programs that have been lost; to continue to expand course and program offerings; and to offer courses and programs that are affordable for students.

There are a number of recommendations that this Committee can make that would make a difference to the public post-secondary education sector. These recommendations require the government to:

- 1) Immediately restore the 2.6% funding that was cut from provincial operating grants in mid-March.
- 2) Earmark \$200 million from the existing budget surplus to allow post-secondary institutions to increase access and affordability.

- 3) Make a long-term commitment to reduce tuition fees over the next five years to ensure that middle and lower income families are able to fully participate in public post-secondary education.
- 4) Revise the research guidelines to allow the five newly created universities as well as colleges and institutes to better access provincial research funding.
- 5) Bring back the student grant program. The average debt for students completing their post-secondary education is close to between \$20,000 and \$30,000. This debt load is discouraging students from entering post-secondary education and penalizing students who engage in coursework that has the potential to increase their employability.

I urge you to advocate for increased funding for public post-secondary education so that our college, and the colleges and universities in the province of British Columbia, can provide the depth and breadth of programming needed to serve students, families, communities, businesses, and industry.

Thank you for listening.

Respectfully submitted,

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FPSE Local 6