

Hillsborough candidates debate matters of post-secondary education

by Sarah Murphy

Four of six candidates running for the Hillsborough seat in the November 27th federal election were at UPEI last week. In a debate hosted by the university's Political Science Society, the four politicians were given an opportunity to tell an audience of university community members their party's platform.

There were several recurring themes through out the evening, but matters of post-secondary education took centre stage.

"This election presents all Canadians, especially young Canadians, with very different visions of our future," said Liberal candidate Shawn Murphy. "More dollars will be provided for research and development for our university which we consider the economic drivers of this country."

Murphy's party is responsible for the Millenium Scholarship, a federal program of financial assistance for student, criticized by provincial governments, candidates, and students, which proved relatively ineffective in reducing student debt.

Murphy added that his party would continue to make university education more affordable for all young Canadians who wished to pursue post-secondary education. But most important believes Murphy, is that jobs were available to young graduates.

Canadian Alliance candidate Gerry Stewart, made little mention of his parties policies in regards to education in his opening statement.

"We will restore the health and education funding that has been slashed by the federal government," Stewart said. "We will restore that back to the 1993-94 levels."

Instead, he emphasized lack of support given by the

Chretien government to the Canadian Armed Forces.

"We will rebuild and reform our justice system, and work towards finding proper funding for our Canadian military which has been so beleaguered by the cuts and has severely affected our ability to be an international presence," Stewart said.

But when asked about the Canadian Alliance's stand on the state of post-secondary education, Stewart said his party was committed to reforming the Canada Student Loan Program by instating interest relief, loan remission, and adopting a system by which students would be granted financial assistance according to their academic record.

Dolores Crane also criticized the Liberal government's initiatives in funding education.

"I am very unhappy with the direction of this country when I sit back and think of the situation of students I to talk to everyday in the campaign," said Crane. "Many of these students are carrying around a debt load between 20 and 30 thousand dollars."

Crane gave the example of a veterinary medicine student she had recently met with who's debt has now reach over 50 thousand dollars.

"How that has happened," explained Crane, "is that over the last seven years the Liberal government's stand on education has basically been a policy where by, it's prescription for poverty, the death sentence as far as I am concerned."

"It used to be, a long time ago in this country, when you could get an affordable education whether you were rich or you were poor." Crane continued, "But at this point in time we are almost at the stage where we have to be

wealthy in order to be well educated. I don't like to see that happening and I don't like the direction the country is going in."

Crane added that the debt load on students was far too high, and that therefore the surplus accumulated by the liberal government should be reinvested in students. She emphasized cutting tuition fees, allocating grants other than programs such as the Millenium scholarships, and making students more competitive on the world market.

Fourth and final candidate, Progressive-Conservative Darren Peters, voiced his critique of the federal government's stand on post-secondary education.

"Education is [an] essential service and post-secondary education, [an] area where provincial and federal cooperation is required," Peters said. "It is another area where misplaced federal priorities have had a negative impact."

"Federal support for post-secondary education has dropped by 50 per cent since 1979-80, total federal support for post-secondary education represents 1.6 per cent of total spending," he added. "Obviously not a Chretien, not a liberal priority."

Peters said he believed that every student in the audience felt the impact, and that students were therefore forced to deal with higher student debt.

The conservatives, said Peters, are committed to the restoration of the federal chair of funding and want to insure that student loans can be repaid as a percentage of after tax income. Also, the party plans to work to support more university research.

BJ McCarville, Student Union President, met the candi-

dates prior to the debate. She felt that although the candidates had demonstrated a genuine concern about post-secondary education during this meeting, the debate had not done the four candidates justice.

"On the issue of education, the NDP and the Conservative [candidates] took the lead and empathized most with the current crisis in post-secondary education," said McCarville. "[They] have genuine concerns in making changes."

Some criticisms by party representatives were uncalled for, said McCarville, who is still undecided as to which party she will vote for in next week's election.

"[There] were a lot of attacks on the Liberal party," she said. "I felt like the crowd was almost too hard on this new candidate. No one really examined the faults of the other parties."



Deluxe Snowboarder Super Value Deal

\$399^{tax}



Smooth cycle

172 Prince St
Charlottetown
(902) 566 5530