

News

Election Promise of \$1M to UPEI in doubt; Result could be higher increase in tuition

By Nicholas Stewart
News Editor

Serious doubts are being cast over whether the provincial government will live up to a commitment to increase funding to the UPEI operating budget by \$1 Million, a pledge made by the Progressive Conservatives during the provincial election campaign last September. When contacted, a spokeswoman for the Minister of Education would not confirm the provincial government still intends to deliver the additional funding as promised.

This comes as very troubling news to UPEI Student Union President Brandon MacKenzie who has already been increasingly worried about the extent of possible tuition increases for the next school year beginning in September. He said the University Board of Governors had originally planned for a 4 % increase in tuition in an effort to match rising operational costs such as electrici-

ty, maintenance, etc. The 4 % increase was proposed before two important events MacKenzie said. The first was the bargaining agreement signed with the Faculty Association recently, which will increase the operational budget. Then there are the doubts about the promised additional funding. MacKenzie told the Cadre the 4 % increase was based on estimates that included a \$1 Million increase in funding for the operational budget from the provincial government, one of the Progressive Conservatives' election promises made last September. If the province fails to deliver this funding MacKenzie says the university will recoup these funds from students, creating a tuition rate hike considerably higher than 4%.

"There hasn't been any announcement yet because the budget hasn't come down, but facing the burden that a projected \$73 Million deficit has on the province, recent speculation indicates that indeed this election

promise is in jeopardy and may fall to the cutting knife," MacKenzie stated.

Jean Doherty, the Communications Director for Mildred Dover, the Minister of Education, would not comment on the status of this funding, except to say an announcement would be made through the budget process. Ms. Dover was unavailable for comment and did not return the Cadre's calls. These signals from the government do nothing to dispel rumours that the additional funding will be cut, instead increasing speculation the Tories intend to back-track on their election promise.

Gary Bradshaw, the VP of Finance and Facilities for UPEI said that estimates regarding the bargaining agreement with the faculty were taken into account when the 4 % tuition increase was forecasted earlier in the school year and that the agreement included 'nothing that would sig-

nificantly alter the budget.' As for the additional provincial funding which is now questionable, Bradshaw said he has no direct information regarding that and there has been no formal notification from the provincial government. He also adds that he is still optimistic about this funding but realizes the serious budget constraints currently being felt by the province.

MacKenzie challenged the government to follow the lead of Newfoundland and Ontario, two provinces which recently initiated tuition freezes despite facing large deficits.

"I only hope that our province could use Newfoundland as a benchmark, which despite a much larger deficit again committed to a freeze and decided to invest in their future. It's too bad such a commitment can't be made here."

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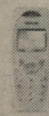
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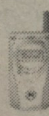
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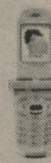
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