

# Why every student should vote

by B.J. McCarville

The Federal election may seem removed from your everyday life of exams and papers, and maybe you don't know the issues, or just don't have the time to get involved in learning the issues. If that's the case, maybe you should think again.

This election affects you directly. It affects you as a post-secondary student, it affects you as a Canadian citizen and it affects you as the future of this country.

Each party's platforms can be easily read on their web sites so I'll leave that up to you. What I hope to inform you about are the not so easy to come by educational issues at stake during this federal election. Education has been overlooked time and time again in this election and it's important that students know the small print on their ballot.

So what are the post-secondary education issues? First off, funding.

Let's be frank, the Liberals are not going into this election with a very good track record. Since elected in 1993 the governing liberals have cut \$5.2 billion from post secondary education. What does that mean to you?

At UPEI annual tuition has increased by \$1200 since 1993, that certainly adds up over a four year degree. In all fairness these cuts were attempts to 'straighten up the books,' but what are the liberals proposing now that there is a so-called \$12 billion surplus?

Initiatives are vague and a commitment to 'promoting access' doesn't mean much to me. Of course being the front runner and the party in power makes it risky to make any funding promises, but when comparing one party to the next saying nothing doesn't look good.

Both the Canadian Alliance (CA) and the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) have committed to restoring federal transfers to 1993-94 levels, and the New Democratic Party (NDP) proposes to work with provinces to immediately freeze tuition fees, followed by a strategy to reduce fees to 1995 levels.

One further note on federal transfer payments which I think



needs to be addressed is the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) system which was introduced in 1996. This single block transfer for health care, education and social services leaves education competing with these other vital services for federal dollars.

A very unfair competition under continuous cuts. No party has mentioned reinstating a system that specifically earmarks federal dollars, but all the local MP candidates I've talked to agreed this was a concern, whatever that means.

The next big concern for student should be the future of the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP). Here's something to ask candidates about when they knock at your door.

Not only is the CSLP already severely flawed in regards to inadequate loans and inefficient means of assessing need, but it

looks like bad is getting worse.

In 1995 a risk-sharing agreement was made between the Federal Government and two of Canada's chartered banks. Although \$300-million dollars were transferred to the banks, this was not enough. The banks recently pulled out of the CLSP and now the entire program is wavering in limbo.

It looks like Canada's only assurance of accessibility to post-secondary education is going to be sold off to the highest bidder (and it looks like the highest bidder is a 49% American owned corporation). If this isn't disturbing enough, no mention has been made at all by Liberals to students regarding the future of this crucial program.

The CA has sent mixed messages about student aid, but what's very alarming is their mention of eliminating student loans altogether.

The PCs have proposed to end taxation of scholarships, introduce a tax credit for post-secondary students repaying loans to a maximum of 10% of the loan and to push back re-payment of loans to one full year of work following graduation.

The NDP are committed to introduce a national system of Grants in place of loans, eliminate all taxes on scholarships, grants and bursaries, make the CSLP interest-free throughout the life of the loan and credit all interest pre-paid since 1995 as payment on the principle loan; stating that government should be a non-profit administrator of the loans.

Also under Student loans there arises an initiative from the CA called Income Contingent Repayment (ICR). This means that students would pay back loans con-

tingent on after graduating income, so if underemployed not forced to be making large payments.

PCs are also mentioning a similar idea but are more forgiving and less concise about details.

This system cannot work if interest levels are not properly adjusted or interest removed from the loan. Students will end up paying off their student loans for the rest of their lives and overall, paying twice as much when you factor in the added interest. If these parties recognize that students are facing severe underemployment and huge burdensome debtloads perhaps they would be better off offering real solutions like loan forgiveness.

There are many other issues facing Canadian post-secondary education as we move into this election and I welcome any questions or discussion (bmc-carville@upeu.ca) about the things I don't have room to mention here.

I want to make it clear that I do not support or endorse any specific party and am in fact an undecided voter to date. Although the NDP have proposed great educational initiatives, it is important to weigh out all the different aspects of each party; where spending is big, fiscal responsibility usually isn't. I have met with all the candidates in the Hillsborough riding and made a point of bringing educational issues to their attention.

So what's important now is inform yourself. I am one person and these are my thoughts, I encourage you to check out the various websites and try to decipher your own opinions from amidst the propaganda. Remember what is truly important is to vote and to vote for who you think will represent you best.