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## **Delivery of Health Care In Canada Is Not Always Universal**

**By**

**Desmond Morley**

During the last few years, New Brunswickers have been indoctrinated with remembering to bring their Medicare cards each time they visit a doctor or a hospital for health-care treatment.

Soon, it may be that we had better not forget to take along a credit card as well, if we are lucky enough to have one. A recently-completed study of the state of health care in Alberta, conducted by former deputy-Prime Minister Don Mazankowski, reportedly urges consideration by the Alberta government of the introduction of “user fees” of up to 30 percent of the delivery cost of health care services.

The study is being carefully examined by provincial legislatures across Canada, and the way in which Alberta handles its recommendations will, without doubt, provide a template for changes in other provinces’ health care policies.

Commenting on the Mazankowski study in the New Brunswick legislature earlier this week, Premier Bernard Lord stated that the federal contribution to health care spending in this province used to be 50 per cent, but is now only 13 per cent.

In the current climate, therefore, it is unlikely that there will be any relaxing of the rules which dictate that a Charters Settlement couple in their mid-50’s, the Andersons, must dispose of all their financial assets and go on welfare before receiving financial assistance from the provincial government.

They need help with the huge bills they are incurring for those of Mrs. Anderson’s medical services and equipment which are not covered by Medicare or by Mr. Anderson’s employee health benefits plan.

The Andersons' plight was reported in the Telegraph Journal.

No doubt the release of the Mazankowski study will now cause them to intensify their efforts to do an “end run” around the province by seeking a 100 per cent tax credit from the federal government for an expanded range of health care expenditures.

Why, though, in a country which boasts federal legislation which guarantees a high minimum standard of the health care delivered to its citizens by the provincial

authorities, and which claims to have a “universal” health care system, is it necessary for the Andersons to engage in such an exercise in the first place?

In Mr. Anderson’s words, “it’s a battle worth waging”. It certainly is, but it’s a battle that should not have to be waged at all. For the better part of a decade, Canada has been internationally acknowledged to be the best country in the world in which to live. Even so, “universal” health care here means that all Canadians enjoy health care coverage, but only to a finite extent.

It does not mean that their health care needs are entirely met, or that individual Canadians cannot be bankrupted by extraordinary medical exigencies - though it could, if we wanted it to.

The crippling medical expenses of the Andersons have been sufficient over the years to impoverish them and to cause them to cash in their meagre life savings, and at any given time a relatively negligible number of Canadians are unfortunate enough to find themselves in similar circumstances. Their medical expenses are monumental when borne by them alone, yet if spread among all taxpayers they would be only a drop in the bucket.

Federal revenue surpluses are still being forecast, by even the most conservative economists, in the billions of dollars. We have the money. Let’s help out the Andersons and others like them. That's what being Canadian is all about.

*(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).*

Published January 15, 2002

## **System should work with – not against – bereaved parents**

**By**

**Desmond Morley**

Under Canada's Employment Insurance scheme, weekly "parental benefits" of a maximum of \$413 are paid to new parents for up to 35 weeks after the birth or adoption of a child. This paid leave can be shared equally or in different proportions by both the mother and the father, or only one of them can take the whole time off.

However, if the child dies at any time during the period when the benefits are being paid, they are immediately cut off. This summary termination policy has recently caused cries of foul from the opposition benches in Ottawa, with accusations that it is inhumane.

Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart points out that there are other compassionate programs of which bereaved parents can avail themselves, implying that loss of time from work as a result of grief should not be compensated with money earmarked for subsidizing stay-at-home parenting, and that such compensation should instead come from the EI "sickness benefit" provisions.

An opposition M.P. counters that this approach invites people to abuse the system by stretching out their claims for the full 15 weeks sickness benefits are available. To discourage this, he advocates that we should extend the payment of "parental benefits" for two weeks after the death of the child. This also would eliminate the need for grieving parents to make a new application and prove their eligibility under a different set of criteria.

This logic may be flawed, though, when theory is put into practice.

Without doubt, most of the "as many as 1,000" Canadians who file each year for EI sickness benefits after the death of their infant child would apply for them anyway. The proposition that they have been forced to do so up to now because their parental benefits were terminated the day after their infant had died stretches the imagination. They probably did so because they were too sick with grief to return to work immediately – perhaps most of us would be. Furthermore, it is extremely unlikely that they did so because they saw an opportunity to salvage up to 15 weeks' paid leave from the tragedy.

A just and manageable solution to this problem, therefore, is to ensure that all parents who are unfortunate enough to find themselves in these circumstances are made aware, both of the availability of sick leave benefits on the legitimate ground of grief, and that they will not be considered abusers of the system if they apply for them.

*(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations)*

Published March 19, 2002

## **Ambitious Growth Plan Lacks Funds**

**By**

**Desmond Morley**

Less than a year ago, we commended Premier Bernard Lord on his statesmanship in having endorsed all the recommendations in the report, released last May, of the Working Group on Accessibility to Post-Secondary Education in New Brunswick, and in having immediately allocated meaningful funding to some of them.

Credit again must be given where credit is due.

Recently, the Premier has pulled another rabbit out of the hat with the unveiling of his government's 10-year plan for economic growth in the province, in which the role of the universities, and their research function, figure prominently.

The Premier has, of course, stated publicly that the goals of the 10-year plan are targets and not promises.

Obviously, he acknowledges that the ambitiousness of the plan requires financial participation far beyond the means of this small province's coffers, and that its potential will be lost without federal and other help.

However, even if the required support from sources other than the New Brunswick treasury is forthcoming, in the implementation of the plan detailed attention still must be paid to key factors, for which the province presently is solely responsible, by which it will live or die.

In attempting, for example, to encourage university faculty to come to, or to remain in, this province by creating an environment in which the research performed here is at the so-called "cutting edge", such an environment cannot be slavishly devoted only to "innovation" (a word with which the plan is peppered) that can be commercially exploited immediately.

Provision, in the form of adequate provincial funding, also must be made for the pursuit of basic research – that is, inquiry for its own sake.

The best and brightest academics, whom we wish to attract to be the nucleus of the research culture that must be developed here if the plan is to succeed, will insist on this because that is where the cutting edge of research often resides.

Furthermore, the successful establishment of a research culture in New Brunswick hinges on the state of its universities' libraries, where much of the research will be performed.

At present, far from being at the cutting edge, they are struggling just to keep up.

Consider the following statistics:

The library acquisitions budget at the University of New Brunswick has increased by only 13% since 1990. During that time, though, the average cost of acquisitions has increased by more than ten times that amount.

As a result, UNB had to cut back its purchases of books from approximately 12,000 in 1991 to only 6,000 in 2001.

Over the same period, it also reduced the number of its subscriptions to printed scholarly journals from around 6,500 to only 3,500 - even though, owing to growing sub-specialization in the reporting of the latest developments in many areas of research, the number of such publications had doubled.

The libraries at New Brunswick's other universities are in similar or worse distress.

As well, timing is of the essence in the success or failure of the plan.

Although the plan itself quite properly asserts that the accomplishments to which it aspires will not happen overnight, nevertheless certain things must be done immediately if dreams are to become realities.

There already is a shortage of university faculty whose expertise is even now in a seller's market, and empty library shelves - among many other things - are not going to encourage faculty to locate or remain here.

Libraries cannot be restocked with platitudes such as "doing more with less" and "managing smarter".

They need money - enough money to pay for the necessary number of current books and periodicals to make them dynamic research centres.

Furthermore, the shortage of funding for university libraries is merely symptoms of a more widespread malaise, and merely reflects the inadequacy of the overall university operating funding from which it flows.

Clearly, then, it is essential that provincial operating funding for the universities – for which, it must be emphasized, subsidies will not be available from any of the federal or

other sources identified in the plan – must immediately become commensurate with their centre-stage role in this ambitious undertaking.

Moreover, students must not instead be forced to pay for the implementation of the plan through increased tuition fees. If it is for the benefit of all of us, we should all pay for it.

In spearheading the formulation of this long-term vision, Premier Lord has again displayed statesmanship.

He must now demonstrate the political will to ensure that the plan comes to full fruition – first and foremost by providing adequate provincial operating funding to the university sector on which its success so greatly depends.

*(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations).*

Published March 11, 2002

## **Where's Commitment To Public Universities?**

**By**

**Ian Fraser**

I have been reading with interest the series of articles concerning the grant by the provincial government of \$2.8 Million to the Atlantic Baptist University. Approximately 7 months ago, I wrote a letter to the editor concerning the fact that degree-granting status was conferred on Lansbridge University. I argued that this was a quick-fix solution for the government, in that allowing private universities to set up in New Brunswick meant the government would not have to increase the allotment of funds to the public universities because the private institutions (whose funds come from private sources and tuition fees) could take some of the pressure off the public institutions. However, I also warned that these institutions would come looking for money from the government when they fell on hard times (as ITI did in August), and that the government should take heed and support the public institutions now. It is a case, I'm afraid, of paying the public institutions adequately now or, by having to bail out private institutions, paying later. Alas, the latter has just taken place!

Recently, the provincial government offered their public institutions a one-time \$15 Million for infrastructure improvements. Of this money, St. Thomas University, for example, is slated to receive only about \$550,000. St. Thomas has approximately 2,500 students and 80 full-time professors, and its physical plant is running at near maximum capacity. On the other hand: Atlantic Baptist University, a private institution, has approximately 500 students and 23 full-time professors. It moved into a new campus in the early 1990s and is receiving a grant of \$2.8 Million. What message does this send to the public of New Brunswick about the provincial government's commitment to our public universities?

(Prof. Ian Fraser is Chair of the Psychology Department at St. Thomas University and Chair of the Communications Committee of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)

Published April 10, 2002

## **Forgivable Loans Would Benefit Students, Province**

**By**

**Desmond Morley**

We were asked not long ago, by someone who is active in the university tuition-freeze lobby, whether we would rather be treated, if we had been involved in a car accident, by a doctor who was really smart and deserved to attend medical school, but couldn't afford it, or by one who really wasn't equipped to have been there, but who nevertheless, simply had been financially able to attend.

Perhaps we weren't being very altruistic, but we opted for the doctor who had been to medical school. The point had been made, nonetheless.

Hence, the news that the recent large tuition increases in Ontario's medical schools have resulted in a reduction in the number of medical students from "lower income households" (as defined by the students themselves), from 23% to only 15% of the total enrolments, must be greeted with profound dismay.

New Brunswick has a growing shortage of physicians, and it relies on the medical schools in other provinces to fill its needs. Consequently, any reduction in their accessibility not only bodes ill for Canada as a whole, but for this province in particular.

The Society of Rural Physicians of Canada has recently determined that, while only 22 per cent of Canadians – about one in five – live in rural areas, half of all New Brunswickers do.

However, a spokesperson for the society is also said to have observed that medical students from large cities aren't likely to be interested in rural practice. Add to this that the society alleges that Dalhousie University Medical School – probably our largest supplier of new doctors - does not provide satisfactory training in practicing medicine in a rural environment, and it becomes apparent the filling of the medical vacancies in New Brunswick faces a growing number of challenges as time goes by.

Therefore, the efforts of Fundy-Royal MP John Henson in bringing before the House of Commons a private member's bill that seeks to allow Canadian students to recover 100 per cent of their tuition as a tax deductions over a 10-year period, are laudable and deserving of our complete support. Nevertheless, this initiative does not go far enough.

What is needed is total – or, at least, vastly more substantial - up-front financial support for students in the form of forgivable loans.

This would permit them to participate in post-secondary education wherever they chose, without worrying whether they would ever be able to repay its cost. Moreover, the loans should be available to all students, not just medical students.

For these loans to be forgiven, the recipients would be obliged to stay and work in New Brunswick for long enough that the taxes they paid, and the economic spin off from their in-province spending, would more than offset the cost to the taxpayers of forgiving them.

One thing is certain: the present situation of student debt load, and other factors leading to denial of accessibility to essential education, is going to backfire on us if we don't do something about it soon.

*(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations)*

Published April 20, 2002

## **N.B. Must Get In Step With Same-Sex Relationships**

**By**

**Claude Dionne**

In 1969, then-Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau declared that there was no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation. Nevertheless, more than 30 years later same-sex couples in New Brunswick are still involved in an uphill battle for equality with their heterosexual neighbours, and – lately - even with their counterparts elsewhere in Canada.

Nowhere is this more true than in the area of spousal survivor benefits.

In the New Brunswick Pension Benefits Act, a “spouse” is defined as “either of a man and a woman”. Same-sex couples in New Brunswick probably find little comfort in the fact that they share this archaic discrimination with their peers in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Nor, we expect, does it bring them much solace to know that pension benefits have been available to the survivors of same-sex relationships in British Columbia and Ontario only since 1999; in Nova Scotia since 2000; in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta since 2001; and in Quebec, since earlier this year.

Probably the sole reason, in fact, for this sudden surge of enlightenment across most of the rest of Canada is a landmark 1999 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. Originating in Ontario, *M. v. H.* was a case involving the right, under the Ontario Family Law Act, of a lesbian to a division of property and support payments from her estranged partner, who had been the major breadwinner in a long-term relationship which ultimately had dissolved.

In finding in the claimant’s favour, Canada’s highest court declared that the definition of “spouse” in the Ontario legislation – which was similar to that in New Brunswick – was discriminatory and in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court gave the province of Ontario six months to amend its legislation. It also urged the other provinces to do so as well, to avoid the issue having to be litigated in each jurisdiction in order for the necessary changes to be effected.

While some provinces have moved quickly to follow the dictum of the Supreme Court, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland have not. Why not?

In New Brunswick, at least, many people are frequent churchgoers. As well, successive provincial governments of different political persuasions have recently given generous financial support to a private post-secondary education facility which has strong ties to religious communities throughout the province.

It certainly would make political sense, then, for any government to let the courts of the province declare such contentious provincial legislation to be unconstitutional and order it to be changed. Otherwise, it would risk alienating a considerable number of its

churchgoing voters by voluntarily offering fundamental recognition to a segment of society whose lifestyle is anathema to them.

If that is the case in this province, such thinking is petty and small-minded. It certainly does not show leadership. Several New Brunswick physicians – many of them devoutly religious - refer patients for, and perform, abortions even though they themselves may not advocate abortion. They do so because, although they do not wish to adopt their patients' values, they also do not wish to dictate to them what those values should be.

Same-sex couples are equally entitled to enjoy a similar “live-and-let-live” attitude on the part of their government and the rest of us.

At the urging of the Supreme Court of Canada, most other provinces have moved to recognize and accommodate the reality of same-sex relationships. New Brunswick should not have to be dragged kicking and screaming into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century over this issue.

*(Dr. Claude Dionne is a full professor at l'Université de Moncton and is President of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)*

Published September 28, 2002

## **Tuition Fees Are Reaching A Crisis in N.B.**

**By**

**Claude Dionne**

This week's student strike at l'Université de Moncton to protest this year's unfortunately predictable round of tuition fee increases sends a message to government which should not be ignored.

In the last ten years, the cost of tuition at l'Université de Moncton has skyrocketed by 86%, more than four times the increase of less than 20% in the Consumer Price Index over the same period.

Worse still, it has gone up by 57% in the last five years.

Students in other parts of the province have chosen various alternative means to drive home the point, but they all have the same legitimate complaint: rising tuition fees will soon render a university education once more the preserve of the lucky few who can afford to pay for one.

Tuition fees are not the only compulsory charges a student must pay to enroll. Added to them are various other inescapable administrative service charges, such as health insurance premiums, use-of-facilities fees, and the like. As a result, actual annual increases in the overall costs of admission tend to be understated.

Nowhere is the tuition fee situation worse than it is at l'Université de Moncton, but the problem is province-wide and needs to be addressed by government both immediately and realistically.

While the corresponding national average increase in the cost of admission to a Canadian university rose by four-and-a-half per cent in the 2002-2003 academic year, in New Brunswick as a whole it rose by nine-and-a-half per cent. However, at l'Université de Moncton it rose by an incredible twelve-and-a-half per cent.

In its recent report "Access Denied", the Canadian Association of University Teachers notes that tuition fees across the country are now higher than they have ever been. In fact, even after being adjusted for nearly 90 years of inflation, on average they are six times what they were in 1914.

One is at a loss, therefore, to understand how governments professing to have an education-driven agenda can continue to let this phenomenon occur year after year in our universities. The average New Brunswick student with a study-related debt load who graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2001 owed almost \$30,000.00 at graduation.

The students at l'Université de Moncton are not protesting against their cash-strapped administration. They are trying to draw the attention of governments to their own shortsightedness.

*(Dr. Claude Dionne, a full professor at l'Université de Moncton and president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)*

Published in the Times-Transcript on October 17, 2002

## **STUDENT LOAN ELIGIBILITY FORMULA NEEDS FIXING**

**By**

**Desmond Morley**

Having lost, by only a slender margin, his bid to give significant tax-relief to university students, through a private member's bill he introduced in Parliament earlier this year, Fundy-Royal M.P. John Herron has recently introduced yet another private member's initiative to help them.

This time, Mr. Herron is proposing that the "parental contribution" which the federal government deems some applicants for government loans will receive from their parents – whether they do or not – should be eliminated from the eligibility formula.

Successive federal governments seem to have been blind to the fact that many parents either cannot afford, or simply do not feel it is their job, to remain financially responsible for their children after they have reached – ironically, again by federal standards - the age of majority.

There once was a time when a government would fund post-secondary education for its own sake, on the pretext that the presence of individuals in society who possessed a higher-than-average level of education would improve the social environment just by their mere presence.

Unfortunately, the cutbacks caused by governments finally coming to grips with their debt and deficits have put an end to this "a-rising-tide-raises-all-boats" philosophy. Now, except in health care and only a handful of other areas, "how many jobs will this money create or preserve?" has become the major criterion for the loosening of governments' purse-strings.

Nevertheless, even against this background of new-found pragmatism, the following statistics loom large:

- The average employment income of a Canadian university graduate in only the first year of employment is higher than the average annual income of all wage earners combined, regardless of how many years the latter have been employed.
- One in every four new jobs created between 1999 and 2004 will require a university degree.
- The unemployment rate for university graduates in New Brunswick fell by 20 per cent between 1998 and 2001.

- University tuition fees in New Brunswick in 2002 are almost twice what they were in 1992.

- The average New Brunswick student with a study-related debt load, who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 2001, owed almost \$30,000.00 at graduation.

The financial obstacles to university accessibility still being placed in the path of aspiring students by archaic and draconian federal standards of measuring their borrowing needs are all the more ridiculous when one considers that the vast majority of individuals with higher-than-average incomes pay considerably more in taxes as well. Government would not only quickly recover the relatively miniscule cost of abandoning the "parental contribution" portion of the formula, but in the long term would as well profit handsomely from thereby stimulating university attendance.

Governments who profess to have no money – even as they are posting healthy surpluses, sometimes in the billions of dollars – have an irritating habit of "deeming" us to have more personal resources, or less need, than is really the case.

Mr. Herron is, therefore, to be applauded, if only because of the growing economic importance of the universities in our everyday lives. He is on the right track in attempting to have this particularly regressive deeming provision removed, and deserves the full support in this endeavour of his parliamentary colleagues on all sides of the House.

*(Desmond Morley is the Executive Director of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)*

Published November 9, 2002

## **Universities Hope For Sustained Funding Breeze**

**By**

**Claude Dionne**

If its recent Budget is anything to go by, at long last the province of New Brunswick has a government which is willing to acknowledge, with tangible financial resources rather than mere lip-service, the notion that its universities are critically important to its future economic success.

Since 1976 the demand in the full-time labour force for university graduates has doubled for both males and females, and has continued to grow exponentially. One out of every four jobs created between 1999 and 2004, whether full-time or part-time, will require a university degree.

Even after allowing for inflation, university tuition fees are now twice what they were only 10 years ago, as a corresponding shortfall of government funding has been thrust onto the pocketbooks of half a generation of hapless students and, in many cases, their parents.

Consequently, the announcement in Tuesday's Budget that there will be an overall increase in the coming fiscal year of 3.4% in the basic operating funding for the province's universities, as part of a funding commitment totalling 10 per cent over the next three years, is a breath of fresh air in the mildewing climate of government support for them which has prevailed during the last several years.

Premier Bernard Lord's government is to be praised for its enlightenment concerning the imperatives of post-secondary education, as is the Premier himself for having kept the promise, made to university faculty earlier this year, that he would increase university funding by as much as his government could afford. Obviously, he meant what he said.

Regrettably, our congratulations must be tempered by the fact that the total annual operating funding allocations to New Brunswick's four universities fell by 8.6 per cent (again after allowing for inflation) over the last decade, and that most of the announced increase will simply allow the universities to recover lost ground over the next three years. They will not be getting ahead of the game, by any means.

Nevertheless, the foregoing caveat is not intended to damn this funding breakthrough on the part of the Lord government with faint praise. As a former student leader, with siblings who are university faculty members, the Premier knows – probably better than any of his predecessors - the dire financial situation into which the universities have been plunged through years of chronic underfunding. Apparently, he also is more acutely

aware of the universities' fundamental socio-economic role, and intends to act accordingly.

Let us hope, then, that this realistic approach to funding them survives more than one Budget, and that this breath of fresh air develops at least into a sustained breeze from now on.

*(Dr. Claude Dionne is a full professor at l'Université de Moncton and is president of the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations.)*

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