

Universities Must Keep A Solid Grip On Autonomy

By

Ian Fraser

Last week Premier Lord announced that, if re-elected, his government would increase university funding by 3.25 per cent each year for the next four years.

That's strange, because last year he committed his government to giving a 10 per cent increase over three years, and we still have two years left to go at 3.3 per cent per year on that one. As a result, we're actually going to lose on that deal in the first two years of the new four-year commitment.

Later, Mr. Lord also made it clear that the universities will now have to come before a committee of the legislature to account for their use of taxpayers' dollars.

This would be fair enough, if the elimination of wasteful practices were the only goal. Unfortunately, though, too many members of the legislature feel that the universities should be nothing more than sophisticated trade schools teaching high-end "marketable" skills. As a result, any such insistence on "accountability" before the legislature is to open the door to the "we pay for them, so we should say what they do" group.

If this were to happen, in the name of meeting current economic imperatives successive governments would feel free to undo, or tinker at will with, the curriculum changes imposed by their predecessors. The result would be chaos.

Our universities, therefore, must maintain their autonomy and I will be voting for the party I feel is most likely to guarantee that they do.

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