

**FNBFA President's Blog # 1 – August 27, 2018**  
**Provincial Election Campaign 2018**

**Strong Universities = Strong New Brunswick**

As the 2018 provincial election gets underway, we can expect a great deal of discussion and debate around how our tax dollars should be managed and spent. The province's debt and economy, as well as healthcare and population growth, will undoubtedly be at the forefront of all parties' platforms, as they are among the most important priorities for all New Brunswick citizens; however, will investing in our public universities figure prominently in our political parties' platforms, or among the top priorities of voters?

Many New Brunswickers may be surprised to learn that one of the best ways to stimulate our economy, strengthen our healthcare and improve the health of our citizens, and reverse the current trend of declining demographics in the province is by investing in our public universities.

In recent years, two important studies have been carried out by the University of New Brunswick and the Université de Moncton measuring their economic impact in the province. Their findings may very well surpass our expectations: the economic impact of UNB on the province's economy is estimated at 1.5 billion, while that of the Université de Moncton was found to be approximately 1.6 billion. These economic benefits to New Brunswick stem from, among other things, research and development activities, entrepreneurship and start-up companies, universities' operations and the number of people that they employ across the province, and the contributions that are made to the province by their graduates.

Repeated studies show that university graduates have higher rates of employment and salaries; therefore, the economic impact of our universities' graduates, or alumni, cannot be overstated. Not only do they directly advance our economic and social development by way of their professional activities, but they are also able to make greater contributions to the tax revenue that we need to support our social programs and public healthcare system. Furthermore, higher educational attainment is strongly correlated with better health. According to the 2016 report from Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Canadians with higher levels of education (and therefore higher incomes) have lower levels of disease and they rely less heavily, overall, on healthcare services.

New Brunswick's public universities also play an important role in our population growth. All four public universities attract students from outside New Brunswick and Canada, and they also make critical contributions to keeping New Brunswick's youth and talent in the province. Mount Allison University, as one example, reports that 60% of students come from other Canadian provinces and other countries. St. Thomas University has found that 71% of their graduates stay in New Brunswick, a number that ascends to 88% in the case of the Université de Moncton, where 7 out of every 10 graduates return to their county, in New Brunswick, to live and work.

It is very clear, from every angle, that every dollar invested in our public universities yields a much greater return; in fact, our returns on these investments may be unparalleled by any other sector. Adequately funding New Brunswick's public universities improves our economic and social development, it helps to adequately fund our social services, it strengthens the future of our youth, and it contributes to retaining and increasing our population. When we invest in our public universities, we invest very wisely, indeed. Strong public universities make a stronger and healthier New Brunswick.