

Excerpt from Hansard of the proceedings of the Legislature's Select Standing Committee on Finance: October 16, 2006

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): That concludes the time allotted for your presentation, so thank you very much. The committee will consider your written report as well. I'm going to ask the next group of presenters to come forward, and if you could seat yourselves, then we'll ask you to identify yourselves for the purposes of Hansard — given the number of presenters that we'll have in this joint presentation.

Welcome to this group presentation. We've consolidated four presentations into one. The time will be the same. There will be an hour for the total. I'm wondering if I could begin on my left with John Wilson, and you could go round and introduce yourself, just so that Hansard knows who's speaking.

J. Wilson: I'm John Wilson, and I'm the president of the Capilano College Faculty Association.

S. Briggs: I'm Susan Briggs, and I'm the president of the Douglas College Faculty Association.

T. Van Steinburg: Terri Van Steinburg, president of the Kwantlen Faculty Association.

F. Cosco: Frank Cosco, president of Vancouver Community College Faculty Association.

C. Oliver: Cindy Oliver, president of the Federation of Post Secondary Educators.

K. Bonell: I'm Kathy Bonell, president of the College of the Rockies Faculty Association.

B. Langlois: Hi, I'm Brent Langlois from the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology Employees Association. I'm the VP.

S. Johnston: Hi, I'm Susan Johnston. I'm the president of Camosun College Faculty Association.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thanks very much, and welcome, everyone. Who would like to begin? Cindy, go ahead.

C. Oliver: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for this opportunity to address you. We have produced a written submission, and I believe it has been distributed to members of the committee. I will be highlighting that, and you'll be hearing from some of my colleagues here. Mr. Chairman, last week I spoke to a member of your committee, and he indicated that the committee has heard a lot about post-secondary education at its regional hearings over the last month. I'm not surprised by that.

Post-secondary education is a vital component to building both a modern economy and an engaged democracy. Unfortunately, B.C.'s public post-secondary system has struggled with funding and policy choices that have been made over the last five years, which are not helping us reach those important goals. We want to talk to you

about how the February 2007 provincial budget can begin to change that situation in a positive way.

In her latest fiscal update, Finance Minister Taylor indicated that B.C. certainly has the fiscal capacity to start taking those positive steps. In our written submission we have detailed very specific ways in which those budget measures could be targeted. We believe that a reasonable first step towards those outcomes would be to increase the Advanced Education budget by 10 percent, or \$200 million, starting in April 2007. That increase would put per-student funding within the post-secondary system close to where it was in 2001. I might add that in real dollar terms, not in constant dollars, the post-secondary system has seen per student operating grants drop by more than 11 percent between 2001 and the current fiscal year. As you will hear in a few minutes from various post-secondary institution representatives, that drop has created no end of problems at the institution level and, most of all, at the individual student level. It's at the individual student level that we as instructors see the biggest disconnect between policies, funding and outcomes.

Hardly a week goes by that we don't hear more stories about B.C.'s skills shortage. We know it's not just confined to the construction trades as sometimes the media likes to portray, but every sector, every occupational group — whether it's white collar or blue — is affected. We're told by the B.C. Business Council that 73 percent of all new jobs will require some form of postsecondary education — whether that's a certificate, a diploma, a degree or a completed apprenticeship — but only 59 percent of the workforce currently in B.C. has that education and training. So there's a real gap that we need to close. But the policy and funding choices by the provincial government are making it much tougher to close that gap. When real funding per student declines by more than 11 percent and tuition fees double, you undermine the work we need to do as a province to close that skills gap. Students, as you have heard earlier today, have been penalized the most. Thousands of potential students have been priced out of post-secondary education. Most of them come from middle- and low-income families. Students who remain in post-secondary education are taking on more debt. Many are dropping back to part-time studies to accommodate work. In our classrooms we see the cumulative effect. Stressed out by debt, by work and school conflicts, and by long wait-lists for critical course options, these students struggle to complete their education in ways that previous generations never had to.

I know this committee has spent many weeks listening to the public, and we have as well. We contracted with Ipsos-Reid, a polling firm that counts the provincial government as one of its clients, to gauge the public's view on post-secondary education issues. The full polling results are included as an appendix to our written submission, and I would like to draw the committee's attention to a few important highlights of that poll.

First, the policy of deregulated tuition fees has lost public support and lost it badly. Two-thirds say tuition fees are simply too high. That number has been climbing steadily over the last two years, and the February 2007 budget needs to address the problem.

Second, the vast majority of British Columbians make the connection between investing more in our public post-secondary institutions and solving the skills shortage. Ninety percent — and that's an astounding figure — agreed that those investments are one of the best ways to solve that shortage. That's a huge number,

as I said, and one that this committee and the government as a whole need to take very seriously.

I want to make two final points before I pass the microphone over to another speaker. First is the government's current initiative in post-secondary education called Campus 2020. I'm encouraged by any effort within the provincial government to identify ways to improve access and affordability. If Geoff Plant provides some thoughtful ways to achieve these outcomes, his time will have been well-spent. However, 2020 is a long way off.

The problems we are identifying today need to be addressed in a budget document, which will be tabled in four months. Between now and then Treasury Board will have to sign off on the budget. Your committee report has to be completed. There's a lot of work that needs to be done if we want to enable the post-secondary system to address some of the critical problems we now face. I'm hoping your committee report will reflect both the urgency of solving the funding problems now and the broad public support that exists for investing more in our public post-secondary education system.

This brings me to my last point, and that is what we hope your report will recommend. Let me briefly summarize the six key initiatives that the post-secondary system needs to see in the February budget.

- (1) We need to see an increase in post-secondary institution operating grants to ensure the public postsecondary education system has the programs and options necessary to support higher enrolments.
- (2) We want the government to ensure that all adult basic education delivered in our post-secondary system is tuition-free for all. As well, we need to use targeted funding to support publicly delivered English-as-a-second-language programs for adult learners.
- (3) The government needs to reduce tuition fees. We support a proposal advanced by the Canadian Federation of Students, who are calling for a 10-percent reduction in current tuition fees.
- (4) We need to fund and use the capacity of the existing public post-secondary education system to deliver both entry level and apprenticeship training.
- (5) We need to improve the student grant program so that students are not forced to take on more debt to access or complete their post-secondary education.
- (6) Finally, we need to enable and fund colleges and university colleges to provide lower-cost university transfer programs in their areas. I want to now turn things over to Frank Cosco.

F. Cosco: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity. As was mentioned, I'm the association president at Vancouver Community College. I want to speak a bit about this — to elaborate a bit on some of what Cindy has said — viewed through the window of our students and our programs at VCC. We have over 10,000 students enrolled in our Broadway and our downtown campuses. We're one of the few colleges that keeps the name "community college." We do that for a reason, because we try to proudly reflect the needs and diversity of Vancouver. Unfortunately, though, over the past few years we have to cross our fingers a bit when we make that claim because of the difficulties that have happened with funding, essentially. We are well known for our many career and technical programs. Students move into fields such as the hospitality industry, hotels and culinary work; health care, providing key services in the medical and dental fields;

and transportation fields, especially automotive and diesel technicians. The entry point for many of those programs is our ESL and ABE programs, our adult basic education and English-as-a-second-language programs. You may be surprised to know how large those programs are at VCC. Just on their own, they could be freestanding colleges in this province. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to fulfill the great need that's out there in ESL and ABE. In ABE, for example, we have students in their 20s or older — our average age of student is 30 years old at VCC — who may not have completed their high school requirements to get into one of our career programs. So they need to get into the program.

Because of funding, our administration has been forced to reduce them by one-third. Even though they're large, they've been reduced by one-third. So those potential students have become invisible. If they happen, because of their life circumstances, to be on some kind of social assistance, then they're taking a real risk to try to return to school. That just doesn't make sense. That's not a social policy. That's a social obstruction, and it needs to be addressed. We need to support the learning, but we also need to support the learner in those fields. Of course, in Vancouver everybody knows that diversity and community mean immigrants. Canada justifiably celebrates their contributions, but it's not enough just to celebrate that. We have to honour their commitment to Canada by fulfilling our obligation to them, and we at VCC have tried to do that over the last 40 years. We're the largest ESL institution in western Canada since day one. We can do more. We have 200 of the best-trained ESL people in Canada ready to help with that social need. Sadly, though, just as with ABE being cut by a third, ESL has been cut by a third over the last few years. Again, administrators tell us it's because of a lack of funding. This is surely misguided. We need the skills of these people. They need English skills. We can deliver it. There's the need; we have the means. Let's just put one and one together and make four. As Cindy was saying, like other post-secondary institutions, VCC has seen its per-student funding levels diminish. Because of funding problems in the last few years, we've had other head-scratching cases of programs with 80 or 90 percent job placement rates eliminated. Resident care attendant is one of the worst examples. Who amongst us doesn't want their mother or father looked after by well-trained, well-paid people? Yet VCC said it was forced to eliminate that program and its companion ESL support program as well because of a lack of funding. We obviously could make more of a contribution to solving the skills problems, but we need the province to make an investment. It's not anything but an investment. I have to make one last point, and that's on tuition fees. The doubling, or more than doubling, of tuition fees in such a short period over the last few years has been really punitive. As I said, our students' average age is 30. They've got family commitments, transportation commitments, day care commitments, job commitments. They can't stretch anymore, but these high fees have forced them to stretch their way out of education. Many just give up and keep working. How can they afford everything? Here's a little VCC twist on this. We have the paradoxical situation of VCC running the largest surpluses in its 40-year history — \$2 million, \$3 million or \$4 million every year — because of the high fees. What does the college do with that money? It uses those so-called tuition fees as capital and building funds. Where is the sense in that? People come to college, and they know they have to pay tuition fees. They end up paying special taxes. They didn't ask for that privilege to spend special taxes on buildings for the future. Hundreds of thousands of dollars at VCC have been used this way — student money used to build buildings for my grandchildren. I don't understand it. The recommendations that Cindy has detailed for funding improvements would go a long way to solving some of these problems. We really appreciate this opportunity. Post-secondary education is key to

the future of this province, and we hope your committee will be able to make telling and appropriate recommendations to the finance people.

T. Van Steinburg: Good afternoon, and thank you very much for this opportunity. My name is Terri Van Steinburg, and I represent faculty at Kwantlen University College. Kwantlen has four campuses in the Langley, Surrey and Richmond corridor. We have close to 12,000 students at Kwantlen. Like many other post-secondary institutions, we see all sorts of evidence that provincial government funding and policy are clearly out of step with need.

I could certainly echo many of the comments that Frank made, but I'm going to give an example of what happened to a student that I've come to know of. She is a single mom who moved to B.C. with her three kids to get away from an abusive husband. She moved to Surrey in 1990. After her kids reached their early teens, she decided to go back to school. She wanted to become a special education teacher assistant or an interpreter of American Sign Language. Her ultimate ambition was to support herself and her kids without having to rely on income assistance. She also wanted to simply challenge herself to do more, and that's exactly what she did. She challenged herself. She started in academic and career prep, which at Kwantlen is our adult basic education program. She was able to complete what should have taken four years in three years, in large part because she was very motivated and very determined. By 2002 she had all of the pre-qualifications to enter the special education teacher assistant program. However, her timing couldn't have been worse. Tuition fees were deregulated, and suddenly she was faced with tuition costs of close to \$6,000. In her own words: "It was the last straw. I had so much anxiety about starting a new program. When I found out I couldn't get financial assistance, I decided to forget about it. It was just too much to cope with." She and her children are now living on income assistance. Her plans for the future are on hold. I also think it's worth mentioning here that it wasn't simply tuition funding that was the problem, but also a lack of some of the supports that we used to have in place that helped people on income assistance with access to post-secondary, helped them to stay in post-secondary — the retention aspect — and then helped them to exit into good jobs. That piece is also gone. The frustration she encountered is, unfortunately, not that uncommon. When tuition fees skyrocketed, many of our students got saddled with enormous debt or scaled back to part-time studies so that they could work. What my members are seeing in the classroom is that these financial pressures put middle- and low income families in a real bind, effectively cutting off their access to affordable post-secondary education. Add in the impact of under funding and the problem gets worse. At Kwantlen we have one- and two-year wait-lists for all our apprenticeship programs. Why? Because we don't have the funding to put on more programs and reduce the wait-lists. Just recently we lost the sheet metal program which was targeted at at-risk youth in Surrey. It had an 80-percent success rate and led to good-paying jobs for graduates, but without proper funding, it couldn't be maintained. We have an opportunity to do much better, but we need to see the provincial government increase its support of post-secondary education if we want to get those kinds of results. I hope your report to the minister reiterates that message and puts us back on track with proper funding.

B. Langlois: Thanks for being able to speak. As mentioned, I represent the faculty and staff of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt, B.C. NVIT, for short, is very unique, as stated in our mission and values and our reason for being. It's an important part of B.C.'s public post-secondary education system. Over 75 percent of our students are aboriginal. As committee members may already know,

first nations students face enormous barriers to achieving success within education. As an example, the most recent statistics do show that for every ten first nations students that enter the K-to-12 system, only three are successful in their grade 12 graduation — on average. Just to put that number into proper perspective: for the average non-aboriginal B.C. student who enters the K-to-12 system, for every ten that start, we're looking at a success rate of seven to eight. That stark disparity in education outcomes has a long and unpleasant history in our province. It's a history that has withheld first nations people from full participation within their communities and the economy. It's a history that has contributed to enormous personal hardships, as well, for many first nations families within communities.

NVIT was established to begin reversing these inequities. Our focus was to support adult first nations students who had not completed high school but who were prepared to meet the challenge of improving their education and skills. Others have described how vulnerable students have been adversely affected by funding and policy choices made by the provincial government over the last five years. NVIT has not escaped any of those same problems. Our institution has definitely struggled with less than adequate operating grants from the Ministry of Advanced Education; a struggle that has forced us to reduce many of the key student support services that play such a critical role in keeping our first nations students at school. I mentioned the low graduation rates that exist within first nations communities. Reversing that trend is a labour-intensive effort that requires more contact hours, more one-on-one instruction, more counselling time, more individual effort. Funding will certainly help. For example, increasing student grants would make a huge difference. I personally see students juggling part-time jobs with their classes all the time in order to achieve and realize their academic success. Just last week I saw multiple students missing essential community field days as part of their course curriculum because they had to go to work, which doesn't make sense. I also discuss needs assessments directly with education coordinators of aboriginal bands. They're concerned — and I hear it loud and clear — about the relevancy of the programs and services. I want to make very clear that when I say programs and services, they are intimately linked. You can't have one without the other, certainly. There's a relatively silent demographic of aboriginal students, which I hear of from these education coordinators, who definitely want to upgrade their skills through ABE, ESL and other developmental ed programs, but they can't access the programs. Current funding is typically targeted towards completion of a certificate, diploma or degree and further employment and not towards the upgrading, leaving behind these potential students. NVIT does struggle with prioritizing which courses to offer, rather than feeling comfortable in the commitment to offer all the courses that are needed for the students to achieve success. The consequence of not overcoming these barriers is significant. The government of B.C. has a keen interest in treaty-making with B.C.'s first nations. Part of that achievement starts with capacity-building within first nations communities. Core skills that are taken for granted need to be strengthened within first nations communities if we are really serious about achieving fair and honourable treaty settlements. NVIT is one way in which we are building those core skills, but the more we struggle with insufficient funding from Victoria, the less likely you are to make any meaningful headway in building this capacity within the first nations communities. I speak of capacity-building within communities. One cannot underestimate the essential need for the aboriginal community's involvement in post-secondary education programs and services. Communities continue to express to me and to others need for culturally based programming — one example being language courses — to assist community members to reconnect, not only with their communities but also with the post-secondary system and, further, with the

B.C. community. Cindy has listed six areas that would begin to turn the corner on better funding for the post-secondary system. The challenge for the provincial government, as I'm sure you're well aware, is to recognize that without those investments in post-secondary education, many of the economic forecasts will not be achieved, will not be realized. That will certainly be the case if we continue to ignore the challenge of capacity-building in our first nations communities. As other members have stated, I hope your report to the Minister of Finance stresses the importance of these investments and the benefits they will provide to restore greater equality within our province.

J. Wilson: Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. My name is John Wilson, and I represent the Capilano College Faculty Association. We have about 7,000 students at Capilano College. Our main campus is on the North Shore of Vancouver. We also have satellite campuses in Squamish and Sechelt. As well, we provide course programs access to the Lil'wat First Nation at Mount Currie and to the hospitality and tourism industry in Whistler. At Capilano we take the principle of community outreach very seriously. We believe that real access to post-secondary education means opening doors to learning in very non-traditional ways. One of the ways Capilano does this is by operating a learning centre at Main and Hastings in Vancouver, in the Carnegie library building. If we're serious about change in our community, we have to find new ways to help one another. That learning centre is a great example of this principle in action. About two blocks east, on Hastings, Capilano operates another learning centre at First United Church. It's a WISH safe house, and it's there to help sex-trade workers who want to change their lives. A third example of Capilano's outreach work is at the Hastings Park racetrack, where we operate the Backstretch Learning Centre. It's a collaborative effort, supported by the community, designed to help mostly adult immigrant workers to get a head start in their learning. I mention all of these examples because they speak to what I believe real access is all about. They are examples of what is at most risk in our institutions because our provincial operating grants are not keeping pace with the needs of our community. Others have talked about the skills shortage, the increasing diversity of our province and how these factors are going to challenge every post-secondary institution to do more. In that respect, my college is no different. But we are unable to meet the challenge with the current funding policy options that the government is pursuing. Let me give you a couple of examples of how funding is affecting Capilano. Our media arts program has been vastly reduced because they simply do not have the funding to keep our equipment technologically current. This program graduated people who worked in the production side of the industry — an industry that holds great potential for B.C. However, with outdated equipment, we couldn't provide the relevant and necessary skills. Another example is the loss of the IBT program, or institutional-based training. This program helped those who were on income assistance or who were unemployed to upgrade their skills. It was a valuable pathway for people who wanted to better themselves, but the IBT fund was completely eliminated in 2002, effectively excluding thousands of potential students. The funding recommendations that Cindy has talked about are a good first step to getting us there. If I could add one footnote to these points, it would be to say that as part of this funding we also need to target student support services like counselling and assessment to ensure that we are matching the educational services delivered with the exact needs of individual students. I would also like to leave you with two facts. I just received in my mail yesterday the solicitation for the United Way campaign so that I could make my donation this year. They had, like most organizations soliciting money, five major points that they

wanted to draw to my attention. I'll just draw one to yours. In order to manage the financial costs of being a student, one in five makes the decision to reduce their course load or temporarily discontinue their studies. I submit that that delays citizens making a contribution to our society in a timely manner. The other I've downloaded from the website. No doubt the Institute of Chartered Accountants has provided you with copies of the B.C. Check-Up. I'm a member of that institute, and so I went and got their statistics. That institute has one of the key factors in the B.C. Check-Up, which it has been doing now for.... I think this is its sixth year. It's called "educational attainment." That statistic shows that in the most recent checkup, B.C. is the lowest in its compared provinces and below the Canadian average and that in the five years they've been doing the checkup we've had the least growth in education attainment of any of the jurisdictions they look at and the Canadian average.

I do not see how in the long term the commitment that this government is currently making to postsecondary education is going to continue the economy growing in the manner that you wish it to continue. Thank you for your time.

S. Briggs: Good afternoon. My name is Susan Briggs, and I'd like to thank you for allowing us to address you today. I'd like to begin by reading a quotation from a well known politician. These words were recorded in 1970, but their point is as relevant today as it was 36 years ago: "Community colleges are the hope of British Columbia's future. They will raise the standard of living for everyone in B.C. They are neither technical schools nor universities, but they are all things to all people." The speaker wasn't Tommy Douglas or even Dave Barrett, although I'm sure both would have agreed with what was said. The politician who uttered these words was W.A.C. Bennett, and they reflect a view that is imperative to understanding why governments need to invest in post-secondary education. As others have said today, post-secondary education is about realizing the potential in all of us to achieve better — better skills, better jobs, and better lives. These achievements result in greater confidence, which allows us to be active and engaged citizens in our communities. I work at Douglas College, where we have approximately 10,000 students enrolled in a range of postsecondary education programs. Those of us who work at Douglas have always seen our institution as a critical contributing force in the community. However, like others who work in the public post-secondary institutions, we recognize that our capacity to make those critical contributions has been derailed over the last five years because funding has been either eliminated or is insufficient to meet the basic needs that we know exist in our community. I'd like to give you a very specific example of how the funding crunch that Cindy described earlier has devastated a program that really delivered on the sentiments that W.A.C. Bennett felt so strongly about in that quotation I read. Douglas College was once a partner in an education program for women in B.C. prisons. If there was ever an example of how learning and education were able to transform an individual, this program was it. Many of these women had not completed grade 12. In fact, many had dropped out even before they reached grade 8. Our program, which had been established for over 23 years, worked with these women to build the confidence, self-esteem, skills, insight and courage they needed to change themselves. It was hard work, but it was rewarding as well. We saw women make a change from living troubled lives of violence, drugs and crime to stable ones with work and positive futures. That program was shut down in 2003 because the funding needed to keep it in place was cut. I could spend most of this afternoon and certainly well into tomorrow talking about how B.C. as a society is paying more as a result of cutting that program. However, I highlighted this program as just one example of how our institution took

its responsibility for servicing the community very seriously. But we couldn't maintain that commitment without proper funding from Victoria. The same pattern repeated itself when we, like Capilano, lost our institutional-based training, or IBT, program in 2002. Who lost when that funding was cut? The most vulnerable students we had at the college — those from low-income families. These are the students who struggle to complete their post-secondary programs. They struggled even to start them. They need help with access. They need help with retention. We have to have the support funding to keep them at school. When they do struggle, and when they do complete their programs, they are able to reshape their lives in positive ways. That kind of success should not be measured only in dollars and cents. We have to look at what it means to the families themselves and the people who complete the studies. We're talking about a social responsibility here. Cindy talks about the economic case for investing more in post-secondary education. Well, we are up against a skills shortage that will derail the economic growth here in British Columbia. Better funding for post-secondary education is the obvious way to fix that problem. But post-secondary education is also about the values that W.A.C. Bennett described 36 years ago. Post-secondary education is about creating the hope and raising standards for everyone in our province — and everyone in Canada, for that matter.

Here in B.C. we are at least fortunate in having a budget surplus sufficient to make the investments necessary to get post-secondary education back on track to achieving what Bennett talked about. The challenge for this committee is to translate that vision and that surplus into specific improvements that will get us there. I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak today. I feel honoured, actually.

S. Johnston: Thank you for hearing me. My name is Susan Johnston, and I represent Camosun College Faculty Association here in the capital regional district. Like the other speakers before me have illustrated, our college is feeling pressure at both ends of the system. Our students are reeling from the spike in tuition fees and inadequate funding from the provincial government means that we have literally run out of space at Camosun to provide the post-secondary education that our community wants and needs. I'll talk more about those problems in a minute and give you a couple of specific examples, but before I do, I just want to describe a few of the things we do at Camosun. We operate two main campuses in this region, at Interurban and up at Lansdowne. We have an enrolment base of 8,700 full-time students. Some 17,000 people from Greater Victoria take a course at Camosun each year. We have a cooperative learning arrangement with the Saanich First Nation and with the Songhees First Nation. These programs are in addition to a very extensive first nations program — access programs, community support worker programs and nursing programs within our college, programs that have opened the door to hundreds of first nations students who might otherwise have never considered post-secondary education. We also have a very extensive trades apprenticeship and technical training division. We're second only to BCIT in the province in terms of training capacity in these areas. We provide a broad range of adult basic education programs. These programs ensure that adult learners have the opportunity and the access to upgrade their skills and meet the entry requirements toward degree, diploma and certificate programs. I mentioned that funding is creating critical problems at Camosun. Let me be specific here. We don't have the money to build the classroom and lab space to allow our nursing program to expand to meet the critical health care needs both in this region and in the province as a whole. It's a critical situation. We've increased the number of people accessing our nursing program, but to meet that need, we've displaced other programs in terms of

time slots for classes for other teachers to teach their programs. That's what under funding has done at Camosun. It's forced administrators to engage in lose-lose strategies that are simply frustrating to the students, to the faculty and to the administrators. Let me also describe how funding, in particular the tuition burden we place on today's students, has affected an individual at my college — someone I taught. In 2003 I had a very bright young woman in my Canadian history class. She was a single mother, about 30. She'd finished her adult basic education program. She was taking university transfer courses, and she took three courses from me in all. She was registered to take a fourth class the following September. Christine got straight "A's." She managed to juggle two small children, Victoria's incredibly high rents and her education, and she was just making it financially through student loans, her child tax benefit. As a non-status aboriginal woman, she wasn't funded by any band or by the federal government. The following fall she just didn't show up. Because I'd known her over a year and a half, I decided to call her and find out what was going on, because this was someone who never missed a class. What had happened was that tuition had increased, and she had to choose between going to school and paying the rent. Guess what won. Christine never came back to Camosun and I have no idea where Christine went from there. For me, it's really quite personal because I see this all the time. Better funding in the February 2007 budget can produce better outcomes — the outcomes we need at Camosun: better support for our students like Christine, better support for our institutions in general so we can create the space we need for learning and skills development.

I sincerely hope that this committee's report will emphasize the priorities needed by our students in British Columbia and that you'll create a budget that works for all of us. Thank you very much for hearing me.

K. Bonell: Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Bonell, and I'm representing the faculty of the College of the Rockies and students in the East Kootenay region. The college operates six rural campuses in the southeastern part of British Columbia in traditional Ktunaxa- Kinbasket territory. It serves 2,500 students — small in comparison, but certainly not any less important to our area. The students participate in vocational, trades, career, technical and academic programs, which includes university transfer studies. The College of the Rockies is mandated to offer and provide access to post-secondary education in the East Kootenays. It's working hard to fulfill this mandate by preparing graduates for our region's growing tourism industry as well as trades certification, education and social services and expanding health care. I'm here today to share with you how increasingly difficult it is for our college to fulfill its role and associated responsibility with the current levels of funding. I want to focus on three specific things. I know we're limited for time. First, the Ministry of Advanced Education expects the College of the Rockies to generate an additional 450 FTEs by 2010. To meet this objective, the college literally, at this point, is robbing from one program area by closing programs to offer another program. This approach to coping results in a reduction of programs and courses needed to achieve the long-term economic and social success that Moura Quayle has been speaking about. The second point is that this expectation of meeting FTE-specific targets is further compromised at our college by the Industry Training Authority and its unwillingness to provide full funding for trades and technical programs, particularly funding for second-year offerings. The third thing I'd like to speak to in relation to funding is affordability. Affordability for students is a major concern for our region and something I want to talk about in a little bit more detail. We have students — I'm also an instructor at the College of the Rockies —

who come to class exhausted after putting in not just part-time but full-time shifts each week. As the semester progresses it becomes increasingly difficult for students to sustain the time and energy needed to be successful. Of the students I know who dropped courses and programs so far this year, the number-one reason had to do with choosing between work and study. This is also for students who are taking studies on line. It's not that students are not wanting to attend. It's that they cannot attend and financially survive at the same time. The other day I was reading an article called "The Price of Knowledge" put out by the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. It was suggesting that students can carry \$25,000 debt in a two-year diploma. That same research was saying that students in western Canada, on average, make \$31,100. That's what they're going to be making when they graduate with that same diploma. So you can see that cost is a barrier for students. What we're noticing is that fewer students — and I'm making a correlation between the lack of attendance at our college — are willing to carry the burden of this debt and the financial responsibility to address this skill shortage. I do want to acknowledge that the Liberal government has made a financial commitment and investment in the East Kootenay region, particularly in post-secondary education. But what we're noticing is that the cuts, the costs and the sacrifices that colleges and students are being asked to make are jeopardizing this investment. The Liberal government has identified its vision, and it has a game plan. What we're hoping is that it's not going to stop in the middle. We live in a province that has the financial capacity to fulfill its commitment to make British Columbia the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thanks very much for those presentations. I will now turn to members of the committee for questions.

J. Horgan: I have to say that when I had to leave the Education Committee to join the Finance Committee, I thought I was going to miss it. Certainly, today is an indication of the importance of post-secondary education to our economy and to the finances of British Columbia. I thank you all for your presentations.

Actually, Kathy was the last person to raise one of these golden goals that my colleagues on the other side will be talking about, no doubt, in a few moments. I can't help but see a disconnect between that objective and... Even when we had the chamber of commerce today and the mineral association speaking about the crucial importance of skill upgrading and skills training so that we can meet the needs of the modern economy, we don't seem to be getting that connection between this laudable and appropriate goal for our community and the absence of funding, not just for your programs but for the students that are sitting behind you as well today. So my question, I guess, is for anyone. I know you're all able to answer, but I'll start with Cindy. That would be in terms of a 10-percent lift: is that sufficient to meet the challenges of the next ten years?

C. Oliver: Well, 10 percent or \$200 million would put us back to the funding levels of 2001, and it certainly would go a long way toward starting to address the needs that we have in our system. We think it's a realistic number. We think it's a number that the government can afford. Certainly, we've heard about the surplus. We've had Minister Taylor say that the province is in a good position, is positioned well to help. I know that you've all been sitting and listening to a variety of groups over the past couple of months telling you various ways to spend that surplus, but we're asking you to invest that surplus. We're asking you to take that money and, initially, put \$200 million in. As I said, it's a start. It certainly will go a ways to addressing

some of those issues.

B. Simpson: I'm going to cut my preamble off to ask two quick questions. First off, it strikes me that we'll have this debate perpetually about funding for education unless we switch it to the other side of the income statement and the balance sheet, which is seeing it as an investment. So I'm curious if any jurisdictions that you're aware of have actually done some work on switching public investment in education — to see it as an investment, not as a cost? Second, we've had discussions. We've gone around the province around a funding formula difference for tech and trade programs. Unless we address that issue, if we still go on an FTE basis, then many community colleges and small campuses cannot afford to run those programs. Has any work been done to put some flesh to a proposal on what an alternate funding formula might look like?

C. Oliver: I'll answer your second question first. The funding formula, I think, is arcane at best. It's something that when a lot of people, even in government, take a look at it and recognize that it doesn't really serve the needs of the institutions that are on the receiving end of the funding.... There have been, over the years, attempts to take a look at it and to reformulate it. Nothing has come about that I'm aware of that's been an accurate assessment — and I think I'm fairly up-to-date on that — of what institutions and students actually need in today's society, in today's dollars, given the technology that is required at colleges, university colleges and universities to actually run programming properly. We've heard from programs that have had to close because they didn't have the technology available. That kind of thing is important to look at. We look at our trades. I believe Kathy mentioned the trades. Some of those things are getting expensive. It's no longer — for example, in automotive service technicians — the fact that you can just get the student a good set of tools and have them get under the hood of a car. They've got to have diagnostic equipment that involves computers and all of that. You're well aware of that. That kind of thing we have to keep up with. We can't be the best educated, the most literate province in this country and, indeed, lead the country as we, frankly, want to do. Our system needs to be funded to the extent that we can provide those learning opportunities for everybody that qualifies to get in the doors. Certainly, in your first question about investments, there are studies out there that suggest that for every dollar that is invested in education, the government gets back at least three. I mean, it's three times the amount of money. You know, in business circles we'd call that triple-net. Investments in what those future workers are going to be paying in income tax....

We all know that people who have a post-secondary education earn a lot more money. Also, in terms of social programs that they will never access because they're able to afford good jobs and to live on their own.... They contribute to society. They contribute to the economy. There have been studies shown that make that direct correlation, and I don't think it's anything that we can deny.

J. Kwan: Two questions. One is sort of following the lines of what Bob has been asking, and that is looking at education as a form of investment. All too often we'll hear from the other side, where they say that the declining enrolment rate in colleges particularly is a result of the booming economy. I know that in other jurisdictions where they have actually invested in education, they have a strong economy as well. I wonder if you can shed some light in answering that question in

terms of declining enrolment relative to the economy. What are other jurisdictions doing with respect to that, and what results are they getting? My second piece of my question is related to the Perrin report. I'm not sure whether or not any or all of you have been consulted in this report or if you've seen it. If you have, what are your comments around it? It's been sort of touted as "the" report. The committee has not had the opportunity to see it. We've made a request to the Minister of Education for that report to be released to us so that we can fully evaluate it. Earlier today Don Avison was speaking highly of that report. I'd like to know your thoughts on that report as well.

C. Oliver: I'll look at answering your first one first. You have mentioned that there are declining enrolment trends in some of the colleges and certainly some of the smaller rural community colleges and we have seen that over the past few years. But coincidentally, those enrolments have happened and have increased as tuition fees have increased. Certainly, with the anecdotal information that we have around our table and the larger table of the people who sit behind me and form our presidents' council, we know that there are students that.... I mean, there isn't an instructor in this province who has not had a student drop out of a class because he or she has had to work. We've heard those stories. These are real stories. They happen. We can say that the economy is probably responsible for some of that but I think a very small amount. We have a booming economy in British Columbia, but I would make the case that our booming economy is felt mostly in the lower mainland. There are many interior communities that aren't doing anywhere near as well. Certainly, as I go around the province, I can see communities that are hurting, frankly. Those are the communities that should be filled to the brim with students. Those are the ones that need to have the community come back to get that retraining they need to fill that skills gap, as I mentioned — the 59 percent who have post-secondary education as opposed to the 73 or 74 percent who are going to need it. I think we can say that a small part of those declining enrolments may be attributed to the economy, but I believe those declining enrolments can be attributed more to lack of access and lack of affordability. It's interesting that you mentioned the Perrin report because that report has been.... We were not consulted as an organization, nor have any of my members. But that report has been released to a very few or very select group of people. To be honest with you, I have tried over the past three weeks to get a copy of the Perrin report and I have been unsuccessful. I have been unsuccessful at the minister's office. It's an esoteric report that I would like to have a look at, but I'm sorry; I can't answer that question. It's been unavailable to us.

D. Hayer: Thank you very much. A very good presentation. I want to say a special thank you to Terri, because....

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Just let me interrupt. Kathy, did you want to add to that answer? Sorry.

K. Bonell: I did. I was thinking of your first question that you were asking. I've lived in the East Kootenay region for 25 years and was there when young kids were being solicited out of high school and colleges to work for Cominco. They didn't complete any kind of formalized education. I was also there and a part of Cominco's closure and witnessed those same individuals not having access to employment. Many are my friends, and they are my families. I witness families living apart from one another. I witness adults who are now 40, 45, 50 years old labouring because

they don't have the options that they would have had there been a different arrangement with business. I take that to heart, particularly when Moura Quayle spoke about long-term economic and social benefits. That's real for our particular region.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thanks. Dave, I'll let you get started again.

D. Hayer: Thank you very much. A good presentation — a lot of detail there — and I want especially to say thank you to Terri for coming over. I served on the board of governors for Kwantlen University College in 1999, 2000, 2001 — until the election of 2001. I remember, when the tuition fee had a freeze on it, going through what challenges it had and also the fact that it used to come to: "How come we can't have enough classes?" We had to cut back. We could not fund... Enough funding wasn't coming in. Also, at the same time, when kids couldn't find jobs unless they moved to Alberta and Ontario... I have four kids, three of them post-secondary and one in high school. They all work part-time to support themselves. My question is to you. The government has increased student funding first, I think, from about \$8,000 in the 1990s to about \$9,200 per student now, and then they also created about 25,000 new spaces by 2010. From there, I think we have over 70,000 spaces already created. That is allowing a lot more students to get in. You don't need to have an "A" average. If you have a "B" average, you can get in. On the other hand, when I talk to students and many of the friends of my kids, they say many of them have decided to work part-time and then go back to school. What there used to be in earlier years, in the 1990s, especially when they couldn't find the jobs... Do you think that creating the 25,000 extra spaces in post-secondary was a good idea; even though I think what we might have to do is maybe change where there are more vacancies — not enough seats are being filled — to the area where there are some shortages, where the lineups are in?

C. Oliver: Any time the government wants to increase the number of spaces available for students; I think it's completely laudable. It's great. The key there is to fund all of those spaces. What has happened in the last five years is that the Advanced Education budget has increased by a little over 9 percent, but if you look at inflation in that same period, inflation has risen around 13 percent — something like 12.7 percent — so there's a gap there. That means that per-student funding has dropped, and in order to create spaces that are actually accessible and that students can get into, those seats must be funded. I would say that's the one flaw in that. I encourage the government to continue and develop those spaces throughout the province, but I also encourage the government to fully fund those spaces, whether it's in nursing, trades, university transfer, adult basic education — any of those.

D. Hayer: Do you think the funding of \$8,000 per student in the '90s to \$9,200 is the wrong number, or is that now sufficient?

C. Oliver: If you look at how much inflation has increased in that time — if you look at it in real dollars — it's considerably less — about 11 percent less.

R. Hawes: This morning we got a presentation from — and this isn't my question; I just want to refer you to the University Presidents Council's presentation to us this morning, which I think is probably available on the website... Some of the things they're saying really aren't quite the same as what you're saying, and their ask certainly is different than yours. These are the people who are charged with running

the universities, and I'm wondering if you're on the same page or not on the same page. But that's not my question.

C. Oliver: Okay. Well, I'll answer it anyway.

Interjections.

R. Hawes: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for being indulgent. We've heard around the province about a 10-percent cut in tuition fees. If I were to look at that — and I still am scratching my head — for a fairly expensive degree program.... We're talking \$400 to \$500 a year; on a four-year program we're talking \$1,600 to \$2,000, which can be covered in a student loan. I attribute university and post-secondary students with having an awful lot of initiative and drive, and I'm having difficulty envisioning the student that for the want of \$1,600 over four years would say: "I'm giving up on my university degree or my post-secondary diploma or degree." I just can't picture that, because it would seem to me that that student, perhaps, in the workplace would be lacking initiative and would be difficult to hire.

[1525]

I give a heck of a lot of credit to university and post-secondary students, and I think they are people of initiative. I'm wondering if perhaps our student loan program needs an overhaul. I know for some, it's difficult to access. I wonder about whether or not it's the student loan program we should be looking at, rather than what seems to be a small amount — 10 percent.

C. Oliver: First of all, I want to correct that figure. Tuition fees, in many cases, have doubled, and it's not just that \$1,200 or \$1,400 or \$1,600 figure, or whatever you said. Tuition fees used to be around \$1,200 at the time the freeze was on. They're now closer to \$4,000 and \$5,000.

R. Hawes: So 10 percent is \$400.

C. Oliver: That's a considerable amount when you consider, too, that student grants have been eliminated. The student is not getting any grants in the student loan program. I would put to you that the student loan program does need to be overhauled, frankly, and students need to be given more of a break. Grants need to be reinstated, for one thing. I also want to comment on the University Presidents Council. They did make a presentation, I understand. I have not read their presentation yet. However, they represent the universities, and we, for the most part, represent colleges, university colleges and certainly our newest university, Thompson Rivers. Universities have actually had more money allotted for them in the past five years, much more than the college system has. So their perspective may be somewhat different. If you take a look at the budgets of the five universities and look at the funding that has been provided in the college sector, you'll see quite a difference.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): The time has flown by, and it's elapsed. Thank you very much, Cindy, for your presentation. For all those who made presentations, it's nice to see some of you for a second time around in this consultation. The next presenter is the University of Victoria