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Students call on province to keep election promise with unexpected surplus

Edmonton, Alberta – Today the representatives of over 100,000 university students in Alberta are calling on Premier Hancock to use part of the unexpected \$755 million provincial surplus announced on July 1st to reinvest in post-secondary students, a group hit hard by budget cuts. The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) believes a good first step would be to fund a yet unfulfilled campaign promise. In the 2012 provincial election, the Progressive Conservative government promised to create an \$18 million bursary to encourage more rural and Aboriginal students to attend post-secondary. The program was promised to start in the 2013/14 academic year with \$18 million and would gradually increase to \$25 million by 2021/22, but has thus far not been implemented.

“We want to see the provincial government follow through on a key promise made in the last election,” said Navneet Khinda, chair of CAUS. “Alberta has the lowest post-secondary participation rate in Canada, with only 16.9 percent of 18-34 year olds enrolling in some form of post-secondary education, and this trend is even more pronounced for rural and Aboriginal students. Up-front bursaries and grants would go a long way in solving the problem.”

In the recent *Ignite! Alberta* student consultation, half of rural students cited geographical access as the main barrier to continuing with their studies due to the increased costs. Additionally, Aboriginal students lag 17 percent behind provincial post-secondary educational attainment.

According to the federal government’s labour market projections for Alberta from 2013-18, 71 percent of new jobs in Alberta will require some post-secondary education.¹ “In order for Alberta to meet the coming challenges, the government should do more to educate its population, especially given the surplus funds. CAUS wants to see more funding for rural and Aboriginal students before the next premier takes office, and until then we will continue to ask the leadership candidates how they plan on keeping the party’s 2012 election promise,” concluded Khinda.

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The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents the interests of students at MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge.

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¹ <http://www.hrsdc.ac.ca/en/ios/lmi/publications/e-scan/ab/mar2013.shtml>. chart 3