



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# Alistair MacGregor

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT - COWICHAN-MALAHAT-LANGFORD

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February 16, 2017

The Honourable Carolyn Bennett  
Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
Terrasses de la Chaudière  
10 Wellington, North Tower  
Gatineau, Québec  
K1A 0H4

Dear Minister Bennett,

I am writing with regard to the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

Since 1996, PSSSP funding, like all First Nations program funding, has been capped at 2% annual increases. However, as you are aware, since that time, not only has this rate been outpaced by inflation, but the Indigenous population in Canada has also grown by 29%. An Access to Information request filed by my colleague MP Charlie Angus revealed that since 1997 the 2% cap on the PSSSP for Indigenous students has resulted in an 18.3% decline in the number of students it funds. Meanwhile, tuition fees in most provinces have skyrocketed, which means there is less money for more students, who have considerably higher financial barriers than ever before.

Even as Indigenous students aspiring to reach post-secondary education increased, between 2006-2011 completion of some form of post-secondary education for First Nations adults aged 25-64 flat-lined at 35% – well below the 2011 national rate of 65%. I have spoken with First Nations leaders in my constituency, as well as Vancouver Island University's president and student representatives of the Vancouver Island University Students' Union, and I have concluded these statistics can be directly linked to the chronic underfunding of the PSSSP. First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde estimates that 10,000 potential Indigenous students are on wait lists for post-secondary funding, hampering their chances of a better future.

During the last election, the prime minister promised to lift the 2% cap and specifically identified the PSSSP as requiring additional funding. Your ministerial mandate letter explicitly states that you are to:

“Work with the Minister of Finance to establish a new fiscal relationship that lifts the 2% cap on annual funding increases and moves towards sufficient, predictable and sustained funding for First Nations communities.” – Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, 2015.

When your government backed away from this promise to Indigenous learners, you announced an additional \$50 million per year for First Nations post-secondary education. I, like many of my constituents, was encouraged that some progress might be made to start to address this issue. However, as of today, not a single First Nations student enrolled this year has received any of this funding.

Minister Bennett, education is the path towards a better future for all Indigenous peoples – especially for Indigenous youth. Education - including post-secondary education – is a right of Indigenous people. This has been affirmed as a constitutional right as well as in several foundational nation-to-nation treaties. Finally, as I am sure you know, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report calls for action on Indigenous students’ access to post-secondary education (TRC Call to Action #11).

Indigenous peoples in Canada have had enough of 150 years of broken promises. As such, I ask you:

Will the announced \$50 million a year increases for First Nations and Inuit students be included in the next federal budget? Will it be prorated to include the amount that didn’t get distributed for the 2016-17 academic year?

When will the federal government lift the 2% funding increase cap on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), as was promised?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alistair MacGregor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Alistair MacGregor, MP  
Cowichan-Malahat-Langford

Cc: Vancouver Island University  
Cc: Constituents