

Students pleased with budget news

By **CHUCK POULSEN**

A5
The Daily Courier **Frb28**

KELOWNA — The federal government's efforts to please almost everyone with Tuesday's budget appear to have worked — at least with Okanagan students. The Harper government killed the Liberals' Canadian Millennium Scholarships, replacing them with a program that will hand out \$1.6 billion in grants to needy post-secondary students over four years.

"We were very excited to hear that," said Krystal Smith, chairwoman of the UBC Okanagan students association.

"We've been lobbying for a long time to get a needs-based grant system instead of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation."

Asked if she was surprised that the government had revamped the program, Smith said: "Yes

We've been lobbying for a long time to get a needs-based grant system instead of the Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

Krystal Smith,
UBC Okanagan
students association

and no. The foundation was up for renewal. It was implemented by a Liberal government. I'm just thankful that money got reallocated to a needs-based grant.

"We were also excited about the funding going into public transportation."

The new Canada Student Grant Program will provide grants to about 245,000 college and undergraduate students annually, an estimated 100,000 more than the millennium fund. There will be a \$50-million infusion in 2009-10.

The government will also put an extra \$129 million over four years into the Canada Student Loans Program to make it easier for part-time students to obtain loans and provide relief for students who run into financial trouble after graduation.

"After the disappointment of the provincial budget, this is especially welcome news," said Andrew Nelson of the Okanagan College Students Union.

"The Millennium (fund) was an unaccountable body with no direct public oversight, and it needed to be replaced," he said.

"Given that tuition fees at Okanagan College are well above the provincial average, students

in the Okanagan need help to reduce their financial burden."

The Canadian Federation of Students says the average student debt in B.C. has risen from \$18,500 in 2001 to \$27,000 this year.

"The government has taken a positive step towards improving access to post-secondary education," said Shamus Reid, B.C. chairman of the federation.

"By implementing a national system of grants, the government has responded to a long-standing call by students and their families to reduce student debt."

The budget also puts \$25 million into a new Canada Graduate Scholarship for the top Canadian and foreign doctoral students, awarding up to \$50,000 annually to 500 people.

University research will also receive \$21 million over two years to create 20 new research chairs.