

NEWS

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Investing in British Columbians

In this day and age it's easy to dwell on the negatives such as the economy, unemployment, and the rising price of groceries.

So this week I thought it would be a good time to look at some of the accomplishments in post-secondary education in the province of B.C.

The one closest to home to me is the opening of our new building—The Jim Pattison Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Technologies and Renewable Energy Conservation—this past summer at the Okanagan College Penticton campus.

This building added 6,662 square metres of space, literally doubling the size of the campus overnight.

It hosts a large gymnasium and a state-of-the-art fitness centre which is home to the College's Human Kinetics program.

Other post-secondary institutions who received new infrastructure included a new building for the UBC Vancouver Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, a film centre at Capilano University, a new Bioenergy Plant at the University of Northern British Columbia, and a renovation of the Schrum Science Centre at Simon Fraser University to support science and technology research.

But besides new buildings, there were numerous funding sources



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es which many of us never hear about.

For example, last year \$730 million in grants and loans was provided to B.C. college and university students who needed financial support to go to school.

The government also forgave \$40 million that was loaned to about 23,000 graduates who completed their credential and were either transitioning back into the labour market or moving on with their education.

For students who face other challenges such as permanent disabilities, \$5 million was provided to these students which covered equipment and services.

Although most of us see health authorities as the overseers of our health care systems, colleges and universities play a vital role in ensuring enough health care professionals are trained to meet the increasing demands on this system.

Last year, B.C. doubled the number of spaces for first-year doctors to be educated in this province with some of these students studying at the new UBC Okanagan Medical School.

Nursing education also grew with 4,300 new spaces and 26 new nursing programs created province-wide.

At Okanagan College we received \$2 million to launch a two-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program that allows students to begin their nursing degree with us and

transfer to UBC Okanagan for the final two years of the program.

This funding supports the program and helped build an impressive simulator lab where students learn in a hospital environment.

Support also went to adult learners who tend to be those students who for a number of reasons failed to graduate from high school and now want to enroll at a college or university.

The government continues to provide tuition-free upgrading courses to all adults.

At Okanagan College these courses are provided through our Adult Academic and Career Preparation department.

There were other investments such as those for Aboriginal students where funding was geared towards increasing post-secondary participation rates of Aboriginal students. This funding went to both colleges and universities, and Aboriginal communities to provide support to students.

The government also provided our colleges and universities \$13.3 million to create on campus gathering places where Aboriginal students could meet with other Aboriginal students and be provided with peer mentoring support.

All these initiatives help to strengthen the post-secondary system in B.C. which will attract more students to our campuses.

These are good investments.

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