

For Immediate Release

Albertan Universities' Positive Impacts during the COVID-19 Crisis

Edmonton, May 11, 2020 - Investment in post-secondary education by past governments means that Alberta universities are now at the forefront of developing both a COVID-19 vaccine and providing insight on the new normal we are all facing today. As a result of past investment, our Alberta university researchers are internationally recognized, respected and positioned to immediately transfer their research to the problems that our society faces with COVID-19.

"Alberta universities are the innovation and knowledge powerhouses of this province," said Dr. Heather Bruce, President of the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Association (CAFA) and Professor in the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Alberta. "The research produced in our post-secondary institutions will be key to defeating COVID-19 and will benefit the long term health of Albertans."

Mobilization against COVID-19 by Alberta universities is widespread. The University of Calgary's Cumming School of Medicine is now focused on understanding the impact of COVID-19 on children. Researchers at the Li Ka Shing Institute of Virology at the University of Alberta are developing a vaccine for COVID-19 and investigating strategies to treat the symptoms of the virus. Also at the University of Alberta, Dr. Le Xiaochun, an analytical and environmental toxicology researcher, is collaborating with the Wuhan Institute of Virology to develop tools for rapid and inexpensive COVID-19 screening. At the University of Lethbridge, Drs. Igor and Olga Kovalchuk, of the Plant Biotechnology Laboratory, are studying how medical cannabis cultivars helps combat symptoms of the COVID-19 virus.

The social sciences are contributing as well, with Dr. Timothy Caulfield of the University of Alberta is investigating policies to mitigate a pandemic "infodemic" by developing a road map for future governments to use to prevent the propagation of unreliable information in this age of social media. At Mount Royal University, Dr. Joe Pavelka, a professor of Health and Physical Education, is addressing travel fears and aspirations during the COVID crisis in anticipation of returning to open travel. These are just some of the critically important projects being carried out at Alberta's research-intensive universities.

Today, not only are Alberta universities fighting against COVID-19, they are having to fight for their very existence as they battle to deliver on their academic mission in the face of massive cuts imposed by the UCP government. The UCP government's *Blue Ribbon Report* compares Alberta's post-secondary education system to those of Ontario and British Columbia, but neither of those provinces is choosing to hobble their universities in the middle of a national health emergency with draconian, short-sighted cuts. Kenney's government instead has continued with both funding cuts and has imposed new spending restrictions at a time which university funding is

directed toward researching COVID-19 solutions and training the essential services workers of tomorrow.

Dr. Bruce states "Now is the time to be increasing funding to post-secondary education as the return on investment will far exceed this expenditure. The economic impact associated with Alberta's universities aren't just in big cities: Athabasca University and University of Lethbridge are vital regional employers, and extension programs reach into all corners of this province."

Putting Albertans on the federal purse is not the solution to this province's economic woes and pulling investment from Alberta universities will not only slow finding solutions to the COVID-19 crisis but will put Alberta's economic recovery in jeopardy. The economic impact of these cuts is far reaching and will limit economic stimulus in all regions of the province. Cutting the budgets of universities impacts all parts of our economy, as universities are generally the largest regional employer, and students and staff spend money in their local communities. Job losses and temporary layoffs at our universities will lead to less discretionary spending at a time when companies desperately need our business. Returning investment to the Alberta post secondary education institutions means that Alberta universities can continue to train our heroes of tomorrow while playing an important role in the everyday economies of average Albertans and the post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

CAFA is a federation of academic staff associations in Alberta. The five member associations are: The Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta, Athabasca University Faculty Association, Grant MacEwan Faculty Association, Mount Royal University Faculty Association and the University of Lethbridge Faculty Association. The objectives of the Confederation are to promote the quality of education in the province and to promote the well-being of Alberta universities and their academic staff.