

## Media Release

### Alberta Budget 2024: False savings and expensive hobby horses

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(Edmonton) Alberta Budget 2024 continues the erosion in support for Alberta's public colleges and universities, Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) President Dan O'Donnell argued today in a press-release.

"This is a budget that is full of false savings and expensive hobby horses," O'Donnell said. "It continues the assault on our province's public post-secondary institutions by providing a below-inflation increase in operational funding, while throwing taxpayer money at private, for-profit career colleges."

While operational funding for public sector colleges and universities is projected to increase by only 1.5%, O'Donnell noted, the government is increasing taxpayer support for for-profit colleges such as Makimi College by nearly 25%. "The increase for public colleges and universities is far below inflation and growth," O'Donnell noted, "while the increase in taxpayer money going to fund the profits at private colleges is three times bigger than any other item in the Advanced Education highlights. This creeping privatization is how you destroy years of public investment."

The budget also requires public colleges and universities to make up their losses by finding additional sources of revenue, something that O'Donnell said encourages short-term thinking and poor decision-making by University Boards.

"We have heard in recent months how cash-strapped institutions across the country have been exploiting risk-associated foreign student fees to make up for reductions in government investment," O'Donnell noted. "With this budget, the Government of Alberta is encouraging our public institutions to take on even more risk to cover basic operating expenses."

It was these kinds of excessive risks, O'Donnell noted, that led to the unprecedented bankruptcy at Laurentian University in Ontario in 2021. "We have seen what happens when Universities are encouraged to take risks with public funds," O'Donnell said. "It leads to public infrastructure being sold off at clearance prices."

Not everything in the budget was bad for the sector, O'Donnell noted, pointing particularly to \$55 million to the University of Calgary to increase enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programming and \$26 million in capital funding and \$43 million in operational fundings to the University of Lethbridge and U of C to establish a Rural Medical Teaching School in collaboration with the University of Calgary.

But while these are important, O'Donnell said, they are not enough to compensate for the broader losses the sector is experiencing. "You can't manage your way into prosperity by focusing only on today's needs," O'Donnell said. "Alberta's public universities and colleges are an investment in tomorrow: the new technologies, new opportunities, and new ways of understanding the world that will allow for continued prosperity."