

Media Release

Bill 18: Turning Albertans into Second-Class Citizens

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(Edmonton) The Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA) condemns the introduction of Bill 18, the “Provincial Priorities Act,” as an unprecedented attack on ethical research and the ability of Albertans to compete with other Canadians for federal dollars, CAFA President Dan O’Donnell said today.

“Adding the Province as a gatekeeper does nothing to defend provincial priorities,” O’Donnell said, arguing that it restricts Albertans’ ability to compete with other Canadians. “The only result will be to make it more difficult for Albertans to bring federal dollars into the province.”

CAFA is concerned about how this legislation will stifle innovation with its bureaucratic oversight and make it even harder for universities to be the driver of innovation in the Alberta economy.

O’Donnell argues that the Bill also misunderstands how federal research dollars are allocated. “Federal research money is not given out by Ottawa bureaucrats or politicians,” he said. “The panels that make these awards are staffed by researchers who are experts in their fields, including many from Albertan universities.”

“The sole criterion is research excellence,” O’Donnell continued, noting that he has served on almost a dozen such committees over his career, including assisting in the design of one federal program. “Ideology plays no role in the distribution of awards; projects are judged on the basis of their individual merit. Internationally recognized researchers know more than government bureaucrats about what makes research important.”

In fact, O’Donnell argued, it is Bill 18 that introduces ideology into the funding process.

“High quality medicine, science, and policy depends on ethical research practices,” O’Donnell said. “And that means judging research on its own merits and not on the basis of whether the Premier likes what she sees. The question I ask myself when I am prescribed a drug or rely on science-based policy is whether it is safe and ethical, not whether the leader of the UCP thinks it will help her win an election.”

Above all, O’Donnell argued, the Bill simply reduces opportunities for Albertans compared to other Canadians. “Over the last thirty years, I’ve brought over \$1 million in research grants to the University of Lethbridge and 90% of that has gone in wages to support students at Alberta’s universities. By restricting our ability to compete for federal dollars with other Canadian researchers on an equal playing field, all this bill does is ensure that universities in other provinces will have greater access to what used to be our share of federal research funding.”

“The people who are harmed by this are Albertans, not the Federal Government,” O’Donnell said.

“‘Back off or I’ll shoot myself in the foot’ is a strange way to teach Ottawa a lesson.”