

The Mount Royal Faculty Association is deeply concerned by recent statements from the provincial government regarding the future of post-secondary education.

The Minister of Enterprise and Advanced Education, Thomas Lukaszuk, has stated that the provincial government intends to take a more significant role in determining university priorities and research strategies. This political control of academic programs and direct government interference in the operations of universities runs contrary to the purpose of higher education and threatens the fundamental value of academic freedom that is necessary in any respected post-secondary institution.

Lukaszuk claims that this control is necessary to ensure taxpayers receive adequate return on their investment and so that universities can act as “enablers of our economy.” Currently, Mount Royal University receives about 42% of its revenue from the government. Yet, despite this low level of public investment, the university makes significant contributions to the Alberta economy. Higher education has become a pre-requisite for entry into the workforce, with an estimated 70 per cent of new jobs requiring some level of post-secondary education. Individuals with a university degree can expect higher lifetime earnings than their counterparts without post-secondary education, leading to greater health and productivity and a considerable expansion of the province’s tax base. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) 2012 report *Public Education for the Public Good* estimates that “the direct public benefit of investing in post-secondary education was in excess of \$100,000 per individual, a 160 per cent return on each dollar invested,” according to figures published by the OECD. As such, investments in higher education are good for the economy and for our province.

Premier Redford states that “the government wants to see applied research at post-secondary facilities focus on economic development and diversification.” While applied research and its outcomes are important, it must be free from direct political interference. Moreover, a broad-based education also has tremendous value. Statements from numerous CEOs and economists highlight the value and importance of a liberal arts education; they argue that individuals with broad knowledge are more employable and trainable in an ever-changing economy. Students who obtain general arts and science degrees have skills that make them adaptable, innovative, and entrepreneurial; the future of the province will depend on the work done by these individuals.

The Mount Royal Faculty Association urges the provincial government to collaborate with universities to create affordable, accessible education to ensure that all Albertans can contribute to the future of the province in effective and productive ways. We also urge the government to fulfill previous commitments made to increase the funding to post-secondary education in the province.