



SPEECH TO CATNB | NBPLAR SYMPOSIUM*

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**Check against delivery*

Good afternoon.

To be honest, when Pauline and Phil asked me if I was interested in addressing this symposium, I wondered if they had rung the wrong number. Only two days ago, credential portability could not have been farther from my radar.

In listening to the speeches this morning though, I realise — as the son of an immigrant and immigrant myself, with international education credentials, postsecondary credentials from two different provinces, experiential learning, and work experience in Canada and overseas — I might be a half decent example to talk about my personal and professional experience with credential portability and the immigrant experience in Canada.

Assuming that many of you are unfamiliar with the NBSA and our work, briefly: we are not a student union. Rather, we are the advocacy arm of four of the five student unions in the province, representing more than 12,000 university students.

My mandate is clear: accessible, affordable, high-quality postsecondary education in New Brunswick.

This symposium is about transforming New Brunswick, so let's start with some essentials from our perspective: well-funded university operations and physical infrastructure is fundamental for the support of New Brunswick's participation in the knowledge economy. In other words, New Brunswick's path to economic and cultural prosperity starts at its universities and higher education sectors.

In this country alone, higher education is an almost \$200 billion industry. Student outcomes are economic outcomes. That is why, all around the world, governments are recognizing that investments in their higher education sectors is smart economic policy. We need to get on the same page as the rest of the world.



There is a strong national consensus on the need for innovation as an economic driver and if this province wants to be competitive, then we need people who have those skills. We cannot raise economic performance without investing in skills and these skills are developed at our higher education institutions.

In 10 days, we begin our 2016 Advocacy Week, during which we will be talking to Cabinet, MLAs of all parties, senior civil servants, university admin, and other key stakeholders. Our message is clear: economic transformation and renewal in this province does not happen unless we commit to investing in our youth.

Our postsecondary sector in New Brunswick is a multi-billion dollar industry. We believe that postsecondary education should be a central pillar of our economic policies.

What we do to maximize the potential human capital in this province will determine our future prosperity. Only with targeted, sustained, and committed investments in our postsecondary sector can we attract the most ambitious, creative, and inspired young people across the country and the world who can see first hand the rewards of their hard work and talent.

Who don't see have not but the potential to have. The potential to be the most innovative hub in Canada. The potential to not just be the smart province, but the dream province.

But you see, these young people we're bringing in from other parts of Canada or from overseas, or even our young people that we're fostering here in New Brunswick...

... They come with expectations. These are young people who believe that the result of their participation in higher education is not just a credential, but also a highly transportable skillset that will enable them to contribute to their communities, wherever those may be.

Our word of warning to the government here has been that a higher education conditional on you not going anywhere with it afterwards is not an attractive one.

You see, mine is a cohort who prioritizes the quality and accessibility of higher education and emphasizes the need for continuous learning while maintaining a good quality of life. And as if all that was not already hard enough, mine is a generation of students increasingly accustomed to cross-cultural dialogue, which means that the diversity of their learning environments is the norm and they expect the work force to be no different.

So we must ask: Is our labour force ready to deliver on those? Are our universities?



We've said before to government when talking about public funding to our universities — because governments here think that simply saying access over and over and over again is enough — what are you increasing access to? What is the point of all the money and political capital you spend on not just access but selling the need for it when the very thing you're providing access to is a chronically underfunded higher education sector?

Higher education has a societal ROI of \$5.40. Why would you hamper your economy by not investing in it?

That same principles applies to credential transfer and portability.

Say we properly fund access and properly fund universities... what is the point of all that if at the end of it all, I can't go next door and have my learning recognised?

If we are setting up our universities and other institutions as the training grounds of new ideas and talent for a knowledge economy, then we must also be prepared to help our graduates transition to a globalised market for knowledge workers.

In other words, we need to stop worrying about our people leaving and start focusing on how we can better invest in them.

Normally I would end there, but I just wanted to say something on international students:

Yesterday, I said that they were the only growing demographic of students in Atlantic Canada. I lied because it served the purpose of my question. But the reality is: though they may be the fastest growing, they're not the only growing demographic of students. In the next decade, 400,000 First Nations and Indigenous youth are expected to join the workforce. We have a plan for that, right?

Likewise, the other reality is that although international student enrolment went up across Atlantic Canada last year, our enrolment numbers here in New Brunswick fell by almost 8%. It's not a fatal blow, but it's what I would call a warning shot across our bow. There's something we are not doing in this province to make ourselves as, if not more, attractive than Newfoundland, or Nova Scotia, or even PEI, which saw a 19.5% increase in international numbers.

Higher education is our second largest export in NB after natural resources. Looking at our population and economic growth strategies, we're banking hard on them coming here. And when they don't, everyone in here suffers. We can and should be doing better.