

Remarks by

The Honourable John Milloy

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

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Check Against Delivery

Thank you Tony [Tony Tilly, President of Fleming College & Chair of Committee of Presidents] for that kind introduction.

And I also want to take this opportunity to thank Tony for all of his hard work and leadership, both as president of Fleming College and now, as the Chair of the Committee of Presidents of Colleges Ontario.

To all of you here today who work in our colleges, I want to thank you as well, for your continued commitment and dedication to shaping the young minds of our future.

And to the students here this afternoon, I have one short but important message: There is a great deal depending on you. The future of our province... our economic strength... our ability to attract jobs and to continue to enjoy a growing and prosperous society... it all depends on you.

It depends on your ability to be innovative and to contribute to the ongoing struggle to address a long list of problems for which we simply don't have immediate answers.

There's never been a time when so much depended on the success of our next generation and your success is Ontario's success.

But also be reassured – you are products of an amazing postsecondary education system and none of us have any doubts about your abilities to succeed.

It's great to be a part of an afternoon focused on bringing the perspective of various Ministers and even political parties from Queen's Park on the importance of our College system.

And I want to acknowledge right of the bat, that as only a Minister, being asked to speak on behalf of the governing party – following the speeches of not one but two party leaders – I am feeling a little overwhelmed.

And although a daunting task – I will try my best – and start with the central issue that is on all our minds – the incredible changes that are occurring within our society and our economy.

Globalization, the rise of new technologies, the recent economic downturn – these are all examples of forces that have altered the entire nature of our Province at a pace that is nothing short of staggering.

Gone are the days when you could finish high school and find a job in a local mill or factory that would see you through to retirement.

We are living in a changed world here in Ontario – a world that revolves around knowledge and skills. A world where education and training beyond high school is increasingly becoming essential.

I know you've all been hearing me talk about this for the last three years and I know I'm preaching to the choir a bit, but postsecondary education truly is the cornerstone of our future economic success.

Rick Miner's report: People without Jobs; Jobs without People, makes that point quite clearly. Times have changed and so must we.

That's why we need to have a postsecondary education and training system that is flexible, responsive and innovative...

... It needs to meet the needs of the community, employers and businesses.

... It needs to reach out to those traditionally under represented.

... And it needs to ensure that finances are not a barrier for any qualified Ontario student who wishes to pursue educational and training opportunities.

These are our new realities in Ontario and if you take only one important message away from my remarks this afternoon – it's this – we get it.

Not simply me, not simply my colleagues who just spoke as part of the Minister's forum – but the entire government – particularly our Premier.

I'm proud to be part of a government – who under Premier McGuinty's leadership has made education from full day kindergarten to elementary to high school – to Colleges, Universities and apprenticeships – a central focus of our government's activities.

And within that focus, I am also proud to say that Colleges have been recognized as crucial players in Ontario's education system. Institutions, by their very definition, are career oriented, flexible and responsive to the needs of their communities.

I am proud of the work we have done together over the last seven years to build up a college system that is the envy of the world.

With 65 per cent more in operating funding, a system that has been able to grow and welcome almost 35,000 more students.

To put that into perspective, that is like adding another three Mohawk Colleges to our province over the last few years.

In fact, across the entire postsecondary education and training landscape, we have 200,000 more students in college, university or learning a trade since 2003.

The growing need and demand for postsecondary education and training over the last several years. We have invested almost a billion to repair the aging infrastructure of our college system and to build the most state-of-art classrooms, labs and facilities.

We didn't stop with bricks and mortar. Recognizing that it is impossible to prepare students for tomorrow's jobs using yesterday's technology we invested \$209 million to add the latest state-of-art equipment to our Colleges.

We have also addressed the issue of affordability by creating the most generous student assistance system in Canada. Over the last five years, we have invested over \$1.5 billion in student aid.

We not only brought back up front grants, but increased the number of student who could get one. Today, one in four or about 143,000 students receive a grant.

With the advice from groups like the College Student Alliance, this spring we further enhanced our student financial aid system.

An additional \$81 million means that...

... No graduate will be asked to pay more than 20 per cent of their family income towards their loans.

... Students will be able to keep more of the money they earn from part-time jobs.

... Every student will have more assistance to cover tuition, living costs, books supplies and equipment.

... And those studying part-time will now be eligible for a grant.

We understand these are lean times for Ontario families and that's why we continue to work to make postsecondary education accessible on the basis of ability to learn, not ability to pay.

With help from government investments, your colleges have been able to become increasingly flexible to respond to labour market demands.

You've been able to expand your programs and keep up with growing demand for graduates trained in new and emerging technologies, like clean energy.

You are also a key part of helping Ontario be a leader in innovation. During my time as Minister of Research and Innovation, we worked with you to continue to build the Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation, otherwise known as CONII.

Through an investment of \$10 million this Network has been able to create better links between industry and Ontario's colleges.

You've also played an important role in training more apprentices. Colleges are a major partner in providing classroom training for apprentices. Your facilities and the skills of your instructors are helping building tomorrow's workforce.

We are proud to work with you on the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund, the Ontario Skills Training Enhancement program, and the Co-op Diploma Apprenticeship Program.

Today, there are 120,000 apprentices learning a trade – double the number when we took office.

One of the strengths of the College system is that it reaches far beyond that typical middle class student who has just finished high school and I want to thank you for the important work you do in partnership with government to welcome students with disabilities, aboriginal students, francophone students wishing to study in French and students who are the first in their families to go on to postsecondary education.

I also want to acknowledge the crucial work you do in helping older students, particularly those from a lay-off situation, retrain for new careers. It is in large part due to the work of the College system that we were able to successfully develop and implement our Second Career program.

To understand Second Career, you have to understand one of the harshest realities of the recent recession – there was nothing fair about it.

It was a recession that focused on people who didn't have a postsecondary credential.

Two-thirds of jobs lost belonged to people who had a high school education or less.

Which is why we created Second Career - to give laid off Ontarians the opportunity to pursue the type of education and training that would upgrade their skills and lead to real meaningful employment.

By any reasonable measure, the program has been a success.

Thanks to all of you, we have been able to help over 37,000 laid-off Ontarians retrain for a new career.

More than half of Ontarians entering into the program had a high school education or less and although the majority are still in training, a recent survey indicated that over 60 per cent of graduates had found jobs within three months of completing their studies.

So where do we go from here when it comes to strengthening our College system?

Is there more work to do? Yes of course, but if there is one thing I think our government has demonstrated beyond a doubt is our willingness to support you... to work with you... to make colleges a priority.

Our Open Ontario plan is very clear about our government's ongoing commitment to education and training.

In fact, work is currently underway with our College system on three key priorities...

... First, an improved credit transfer will allow students to navigate our postsecondary education system more easily and gain recognition for their prior learning.

... Discussions are also taking place with colleges and universities on how to further develop our online learning capabilities that would allow Ontarians to pursue their studies from outside the classroom.

... And we are aggressively promoting our excellent colleges and universities abroad.

You will be hearing more about our plans in the coming months, as we bring forward a budget and later our platform for the next election.

I want to end my remarks today – where I began – with the fact that you have had the opportunity to hear three different perspectives from three different political parties on the role of the College system within Ontario.

I am not going to comment on the presentations made by my colleagues from the other parties except to share one simple thought that I feel is best expressed in a well-known quote from that great 20th Century philosopher and thinker Dr. Phil: “The best way to predict future behaviour is to look at past behaviour.”

I am proud to be part of a government that has made education a cornerstone of both our social and our economic policy. I am proud to be part of a government that has recognized the crucial importance of postsecondary education and I am proud to be part of a government that understands the crucial role played by our College system in ensuring the future success of our province.

And I am confident that together we will continue to achieve great things for Ontario.

Thank you.