

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

#FundMUN Lobby Sessions

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

Dear member,

I hope the Fall semester is going well for you so far.

I am writing to you today to provide an update on the efforts of your union and our Campus Coalition to increase funding for our university.

Last week, members of the MUNFA Executive joined student and union representatives to participate in lobby sessions with the Official Opposition and the NDP caucus.

The goal of these meetings was to inform the opposition parties about the myriad of ways in which a decade of funding cuts to Memorial University have negatively impacted the university community, teaching, research, and learning conditions, infrastructure, and morale, as well as the broader impact on our province as a whole.

Coalition representatives that attended these lobby sessions provided a detailed and impassioned case for why increased funding for our public university is an investment in our province, its people, and our collective future.

The campus coalition called on both opposition parties to commit to supporting the goals of our FundMUN campaign and use the levers available to them to put pressure on the current administration to reverse course on cuts to Memorial University.

Both caucuses were very receptive of the message that our Campus Coalition representatives brought forward. Discussions were constructive and positive. Both parties committed to put pressure on the current government to stop the cuts and restore funding.

Following our meeting, the NDP asked questions in question period of the House of Assembly. The questions and responses can be seen below which was pulled from Hansard - [HERE](#):

J. DINN: Thank you, Speaker.

Speaker, Memorial University graduates are our doctors, our teachers, our nurses and our future, yet this government has repeatedly withheld funding to this valuable resource.

I ask the Premier: Will he restore funding to Memorial University so that it can begin to address the \$481-million deficit and deferred maintenance created by this government's cuts?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to respond and to recognize the importance that Memorial University plays here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We know that it is a very valued institution and we continue to support it. However, we do have certain expectations that the university upholds on their end and we work with them on a continuous basis to make sure that they are doing the best that they can with the public funds that they are entrusted with. We have given them significant investment and even as recent as last budget, we had an investment in infrastructure services where we gave funding to provide relief for some of the campus renewal fee.

So we have continued to invest in the students by putting that money back in their pockets. We'll continue to work with Memorial University to ensure that they are providing the best services for students here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

J. DINN: Speaker, university students and faculty have said that class sizes are increasing, course offerings are reduced, there are no EAL supports at all, that there's discussion about eliminating exam booklets and requiring students to bring their own paper for exams.

I ask the Premier: Does he think this is appropriate?

SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

K. HOWELL: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said in my first answer, we continue to invest in Memorial University. The operating grant that the government provides is \$298 million. With that, we expect that there is a certain measure of – the onus is on the university to be responsible for that money that we give them.

On a monthly basis I meet with the president of Memorial University and have those conversations, as well as the chair of the Board of Regents. We continue to work with them to make sure that they are investing the money that we give them for the best interests of Newfoundland and Labrador students.

As you can see from the responses of the Minister of Education, the government is continuing with their obstinate position that they are doing enough to support the University while using the Senior Administration as their scapegoat.

This position, of course, is not rooted in the reality of what is happening on the ground on our campuses.



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Excluding funding for the Faculty of Medicine, Minister Howell's response confirms that Memorial University has had its funding cut by more than 50% by the provincial government over the past decade.¹

It is simply not possible for our members to deliver the same quality of education, teaching, research with this level of sustained cuts. Of course, we can question some of the decisions that the Senior Administration has made in the past number of years, however, students, faculty, and staff are bearing the burden of these cuts and constantly being asked to do more with less.

The Hansard exchange quoted above makes it crystal clear that Minister Howell's monthly meetings with MUN President/Chair of Board of Regents are entirely for the purpose of the government keeping the reins on MUN's President/Board, rather than for the Senior Administration to do their job by advocating for the University.

What the University community needs and deserves right now is leadership from our government, not finger-pointing. In the spirit of collegiality (and what is best for the province), we need everybody to work together to address the issues that Memorial University faces, including funding levels.

We are still waiting to hear back from the government on our meeting request.

Our Union and our Campus Coalition will continue to put pressure on this government to restore funding to Memorial University. There is simply too much at stake to do otherwise.

We will keep you updated as this important work continues.

If you haven't already done so, please check out fundmun.ca for updates and actions you can take right now.

Thank you to all of the members who have agreed to send a message to the government, put up a poster, and send along words of solidarity and support.

In solidarity,

Ash

President, MUNFA

¹ Minister Howell: "...The operating grant that the government provides is \$298 million...". MUN's operating grant in 2014 was \$444,274,000 (Source: https://www.mun.ca/finance/media/production/memorial/administrative/financial-and-administrative-services/media-library/financestatementpdfs/MUN_Financial_Statements_Mar_31_2014.pdf). The operating grant in 2024 would need to be >\$568 million in 2024 dollars simply to maintain the 2014 status quo (Source: <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>)