

President's Message

Date: February 5, 2025

RE: Recent Auditor General's Report on Memorial University's Infrastructure

Members of the current government have been using the same tired talking points over the last decade and at least the last three ministers of education. They claim that Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) is the most heavily subsidized university in the country. This is false. Our university is a public institution. Public institutions are [by definition] supported by public dollars. Those dollars are not subsidies. Subsidies are what happen when *public* money is used to support the *private* sector for a company's own profit. Our provincial government has generously offered such subsidies to several corporations who promised jobs and investment in our province without delivering, pocketing their corporate profits in the process.

In contrast, return on the public funds invested in Memorial includes addition of approximately \$627 million to the provincial economy each year. In addition to being the province's 4th largest employer¹, MUN supports almost 10,000 jobs throughout Newfoundland and Labrador². At last count, 66,669 MUN alumni living in this province enjoyed a higher income afforded by their Memorial education, which in turn translates to a GDP impact exceeding \$2 billion. Unlike corporate subsidies, investment in the province's only public university provides reliable and steady returns to the provincial economy.

Since [2015](#), the provincial liberal government has cut Memorial's budget in half. Over this same period, we -- the teachers who deliver the core teaching and research missions of the University -- have been failed repeatedly by senior administrators who have refused to advocate on behalf of the public university.

Importantly, the very liberal government that cut the university's budget also appoints the majority of the members to the only body that steward Memorial's fiduciary responsibility: the Board of Regents. In the past, the Board has consistently failed us, too. The evidence is all around us. The Board of Regents approved the university taking on the Geo Centre. The Board of Regents approved the university taking on the Railway Museum. The Board of Regents approved the use of funds needed for maintenance of these and the rest of the university to be put to other purposes, including to cover the budgetary shortfalls induced by government cuts to the university. This is one of the reasons why our university has an ever-increasing deferred maintenance liability. Yet it is not the Board of Regents who are left with a dire consequence of those decisions. It is us, who are left to provide the core mission of MUN in infrastructure that is crumbling, leaking, and collapsing. It is students who are left to learn in these conditions even as they pay more tuition than ever before. The Board's decade long failure to genuinely steward a fiduciary duty in the best interests of the university's core missions of teaching and research is also this government's failure to uphold Memorial's founding promise to the people of this province:

“This University was raised by the People of Newfoundland as a Memorial to the fallen in the Great Wars...that in freedom of learning their cause and sacrifice may not be forgotten.”
(<https://www.mun.ca/facilities-management/about-us/vision-mission-and-values/>)

The freedom of learning is unfettered and unconditional. This government is demonstrably dismantling this freedom as the provincial Liberals continues to hack away at the funding necessary to carry out the university's stated mission. The Furey government is not even replying to our plea to have a sit-down with us. Why? It does not consider the welfare of our only public university a hotcake item at the polls. As the province is nearing an election any day, numbers count. It is time for us to be united and to call for much-needed funding for our only public university and the place where dreams of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are borne.

In solidarity,
Ash Hossain, MUNFA President

¹ Source: <https://www.ibisworld.com/canada/economic-profiles/newfoundland-labrador/>

² Source: Memorial University: Economic Impact Assessment (KPMG, 2021)