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Crombie criticizes feds
Govt. to cut billions

by Greg Harris
 About fifty people turned out Thursday afternoon to hear David Crombie criticize the federal government's threat to cut \$1.5 billion from the Established Programs Financing agreement (EPF).



Photo: Dave Chan

The former Toronto mayor, currently the employment and labor critic for the Conservative opposition, told students that the proposed funding cuts would result in "disaster for post-secondary education."

"It will put us in a position of educational mediocrity," he said. Crombie began by charting the evolution of federal-provincial fiscal arrangements from the post-war system of matching grants, to the present system of tax point transfers and cash grants through EPF.

He said that EPF has resulted in more provincial flexibility in the three designated funding areas of health and hospitals, medicare, and post-secondary education.

However at the same time, this increased flexibility has both denied the federal government a voice in determining national education goals, and allowed the provinces to spend federal funds elsewhere.

Crombie defended the federal government's criticisms that the provinces are abusing EPF by diverting funds.

"There is no question that there was an implicit assumption that the provinces would put the money into the three areas.

"The provinces have not noticeably been strident in advertising the money they get from the federal government," he said.

Crombie emphasized that the national education goals should not be solely determined by the federal government.

"I'm concerned that people will think that the only fight we have is with the \$1.5 billion cut," he said.

M.P. David Crombie

He suggested, that a constituent assembly be established to "think through" what national goals in education should be.

"The best way to approach it is through the traditional Canadian cooperative way," he said.

"We're going to have to have world class institutions in specific fields ... world class talent," he said.

Once established, these goals could serve as a "funding mechanism," or "criteria" for federal grants.

He said that his system would comprise a melding of the benefits of the previous system of matching grants, and the current EPF arrangements.

It would also meld "provincial responsibility with national priority," he said.

Several students expressed skepticism about Progressive Conservative policies when several provincial Tory governments are responsible for strangling education throughout

Canada.

Crombie didn't comment on Alberta, but did say that P.C.'s will remain committed to education in Ontario, a province where tuition is among the highest in the country.

He added that the Crosby budget which felled the conservative government "... did not touch EPF..."

"That budget contained a series of constraints on inner-government spending," he said.

Although the topic of the forum was EPF, Crombie also managed to get in his constitutional two cents. He called the supreme court decision "brilliant" and noted that the federal government's proposals are "clearly" outside the realm of convention and custom.

He said that if Trudeau proceeds to London he will split Quebec, alienate the west, and confuse Ontario.

The forum was sponsored by the U of A Young Conservatives.

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The Calgary office of Touche Ross & Co. is pleased to announce that their recruiting team will be on your campus November 2 and 3. All persons interested in pursuing a career in Calgary or any of our 30 offices should submit their resumes to the Campus Canada Employment Centre before October 15 deadline. Contact the Canada Employment Centre for more details.

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(The Touche Ross & Co. recruiting team will be on campus November 2 and 3, and not on October 29 and 30 as was stated in the Oct. 1st issue of the Gateway. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.)