

Government Orders

Another is the work that the Canadian Federation of Students has done in trying to convince the government to move in a different direction when it comes to student loans. Regretfully the committee of this House that was charged with reviewing this bill decided not even to hear from the students, not to allow witnesses. I think that is a travesty.

Another is because I am a parent. I have a daughter in university. I have a son and a stepdaughter who will hopefully be in university or college at some point in their future.

I also went to university. I must say at the time of my post-secondary education I was very fortunate that not only was I able to access the student loan and student grant program as it existed then, but I also had a Department of Veterans Affairs scholarship. My father fought in World War II and was disabled because of the treatment in a prisoner of war camp. My tuition was therefore paid. I received an honorarium each month and had access to student loans. Even that was not enough. I can remember having a number of part-time jobs in order to put food on the table for my new family. Perhaps that combination is why I never completed university, why I ended up getting a job when one was available as opposed to completing university.

When we look at these particular clauses we see that what the government is doing is placing more barriers in front of our young people, our future leaders, our future business people, our future entrepreneurs, our future inventors, our future scientists, making it that much more difficult for them to gain access to college or university level.

I come from a university-college community. Confederation College in my riding has been a key in providing access to college programming not just in Thunder Bay but in northwestern Ontario. Lakehead University in the riding of Thunder Bay—Nipigon but whose faculty, staff and students live within my jurisdiction also has provided services not just to northwestern Ontario but to the rest of Canada and indeed the world. Therefore, I am very aware of the importance of education.

I am also more aware these days as we see our mills downsizing, some of our mills closing, our grain industry declining, that there are no longer the jobs that young

men and women can get into right out of high school. They recognize this. They know they have to go on.

I have talked to parents who say: "I cannot afford the \$10,000 a year that it will take for my child to go to school outside of my community". I have talked to fathers who are part-time cab drivers in order to help pay for their children's education.

Every time we put a barrier or a road-block like the provision in this bill which will say that the moment you get out of school, the moment you graduate, you have to start paying back, it does not deal with the reality of society today.

It does not deal with the reality of unemployment among young people, even though we all know a graduate from a community college or a university has a much better chance of getting a job. Whether your field is in the general arts or a specific trade, there is a much better chance of getting employment.

The reality is we have an unemployment rate in excess of 19 per cent. In some communities for our young people it is 25 to 30 to 35 per cent. We see migrations of young people out of my region moving to the golden horseshoe in search of work.

The reality is that the day a graduate had a job waiting for him or her the day after the graduation ceremonies is long gone. We no longer see halls full of recruiters at universities and colleges. It is difficult to get people even to come to the campuses to offer jobs for students because the jobs just do not exist. There is so much downsizing.

Therefore to say to the students who are about to enter college or university that the moment they graduate they will have to start paying the interest back is putting one more straw on a very overburdened back. It is not cheap to go to school even in one's own community. There are costs that are out of reach for a number of families. The Canada Student Loans Program has been an exceptional aid to Canadian young people in giving them access to higher learning. That is why we are supporting these amendments, the sole purpose of which is to delete specific clauses dealing with repayment in particular.

The government will argue it is doing this because it is going to eliminate the 3 per cent tax that students have to pay up front. In testimony before the committee officials said that it is not going to happen at the same time. The moment this bill passes the other place and