

# Memorial votes on honorary degree for PM

BY ALLYSON GRACE AND  
SEAN RYAN

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) — Officials at Memorial University are neither confirming nor denying reports that the university will award Prime Minister Jean Chretien an honorary degree.

The university's senate recently voted on the question, CBC Radio reported Sept. 11. But their decision is under wraps because of a strict policy mandating votes about honorary degrees be conducted behind closed doors.

Still, speculation is mounting about the decision. While university senators cannot comment on the vote because of the confidentiality policy, staff and students have begun voicing their opinions about

what many believe was a yes vote. Mark Graesser, a political science professor and former senator, says it's unusual to offer a degree to a politician still in office.

To do so, he suggests, indicates a political motivation.

"It just strikes me as a symbolic gesture that could almost be interpreted as an exchange," Graesser said.

If the university has decided to award Chretien an honorary degree, it will likely present it to him at next spring's convocation to coincide with the dual 50th anniversaries of Newfoundland joining Canada and the founding of Memorial University, Graesser said.

The exchange would involve Chretien visiting the province and university in acknowledgment of

those anniversaries in return for the honorary degree and resulting public attention, he said.

The possibility that the university has decided to offer the Prime Minister an honorary degree has sparked criticism from some students and faculty who oppose the stance on education issues taken by the federal Liberals.

Noreen Golfman, an English professor at Memorial University, says while she has no knowledge of any such decision, she doesn't agree with awarding an honorary degree to sitting politicians.

"The Prime Minister's track record as a politician and a leader, who is endowed with the responsibility of making sure that education is high on the government's agenda, has not proved to be an inspiration

to those of us who are either educators or students," Golfman said.

She also criticized the possibility Chretien would be honoured in light of recent controversy over Ottawa's involvement in RCMP treatment of student protestors at last year's APEC summit.

"[Chretien] has demonstrated nothing but arrogance and contempt during and after this whole BC and [University of British Columbia] campus incident."

Dale Kirby, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Students, says he agrees Chretien doesn't deserve an honorary degree. "Certainly it's a bit ridiculous," Kirby said. "The whole idea is a bit out to lunch. I mean, what have (the Liberals) done? They have cut \$2.29-billion from post-secondary education alone."

Awarding Chretien a degree would be a slap in the face of students who have amassed huge debt loads since the Prime Minister came to power, he added.

Officials with the Prime Minister's Office said they're not aware of an offer of an honorary degree from Memorial University.

# Fund

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The provincial government did exactly that last May when it deregulated tuition for all post-graduate and professional programs.

The legislation has resulted in fee hikes of up to 61 per cent at the University of Toronto, for example.

Libby Davis, a New Democratic Party MP, also says she's alarmed by the appointment of Smith.

"The more we find out about the Millennium Fund, I think, the more we have to worry about it."

But Smith has assured universities and colleges that he welcomes input from students.

"I am consulting the heads of all the major federations of students, faculty, staff associations and colleges in Canada," he recently wrote in a letter.

Smith also defended the 1996 recommendations of the Smith Panel.

"The foremost recommendation of the panel was an increase in government support for universities and colleges because of inadequate base funding," he wrote.

Still, Chris Ramsaroop, president of the student council at the University of Toronto, says he's sceptical about whether Smith will really consider students' concerns in regards to the Millennium Fund.

"The Smith Panel report was very unfriendly towards students, and I wonder about the input that students give and how much will be taken seriously," he said.

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