



Student candidate



Hopeful MP Rik Gates.

by Valerie Ruth Legge

While post-secondary education underfunding is a problem affecting 28,000 university students in Nova Scotia, a 22-year-old Acadia student is attempting to do something about it.

Fourth-year political science student Rik Gates, calling himself "the official education candidate", is running as an independent MP in the Annapolis Valley-Hants riding.

Gates, vice-president of communications for the Acadia Student Union, says it was during the faculty dispute at Acadia that he became really interested in the education issue. "Being involved on a day-to-day basis with the administration is what finally made me decide to run," says Gates.

With 11 universities and numerous faculty disputes in Nova Scotia in recent years, Gates wants to make education an issue not only in Annapolis Valley-Hants, but province-wide. "Education is not and never has been an election issue, and the reason is because it doesn't change enough on a day-to-day basis to catch the attention of voters and politicians. Underfunding has a very long-term effect. It takes years to realize that we've fallen this far behind."

Gates blames the faculty strike at Dalhousie and the near strike at Acadia on the federal and provincial governments. According to Gates, the universities cannot afford to pay their staff sufficiently because the governments are not providing adequate funding. Gates says underfunding is also the reason why Nova Scotia has the highest tuition fees in the country, and students are forced to borrow exorbitant amounts of money to pay for their education.

Gates would like to see the system of federal funding changed. Under the current system, funds are allocated on a per-capita (total population) basis, rather than a per-student basis. Gates says this is unfair to a province like Nova Scotia, which has the most universities per capita in Canada.

"Say New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are both given one million dollars to fund their universities. New Brunswick has a million dollars to fund five universities, while Nova Scotia has the same amount to fund 11."

Gates says the Acadia Student Union is in no way financing his campaign. "Funding has been strictly from concerned students, friends and family. It's a shoestring budget," says Gates.

Gates' supporters say he has 90 per cent of the student vote and that he receives favourable response from the community at large. He is running against four candidates: the most notable is Pat Nowlan, who has been the Conservative MP for the riding for the last 23 years.

by Lisa Clifford

"All issues in the federal election are women's issues," says a supporter of local NDP candidate Ray Larkin. But when most voters talk about issues that affect women, it's topics like abortion, child care and pay equity that come to mind.

Abortion is one of the most emotional subjects in this campaign. When Canada's former abortion law was judged unconstitutional last January, the Conservatives failed to pass new legislation to replace it, and no consensus was reached during a free vote in the House of Commons.

Local Liberal candidate Mary Clancy is strongly anti-abortion. She feels that abortion should not be "just another form of birth control" and cites education and affordable family planning as ways to control unwanted pregnancies.

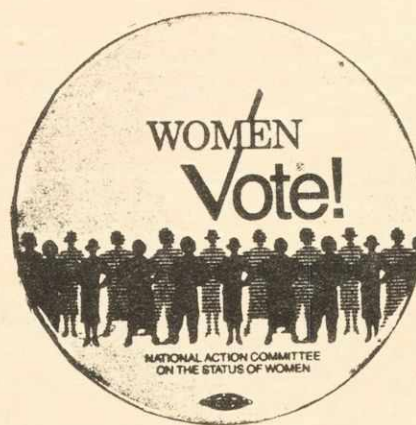
In contrast to both the Tories and the Liberals, the NDP maintains that abortion is a decision to be made by a woman and her doctor. They pledge equal access to abortion services for women in all parts of Canada and promise funding of abortions under the medicare system.

Pay equity, that is equal pay for work of equal value, is an issue especially sensitive for many women who are still confined to job ghettos. On average, women earn 65 cents for every dollar earned by men.



The Conservatives have declared their commitment to the concept of equal pay for work of equal value. In the civil service,

Women's issues affect both sexes



for example, there has been consultation and negotiation with various unions to evaluate different jobs but as yet no conclusions have been reached.

Simply stated, the Liberals maintain that "equal pay for work of equal value is a basic right. Liberal legislation will stop the economic exploitation of women."

The New Democrats are alone in promising "mandatory enforcement of equal pay for work of equal value." In addition, they also pledge job creation and training programs for women to ensure that they get their fair share.

Perhaps the most crucial "women's issue" is child care. As more women enter the work force, the supply of affordable, quality day care spaces have all but vanished. If a parent is lucky enough to find child care, the average annual costs are between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per child.

Flexibility seems to be the key word with all political parties and all propose a system that attempts to meet the needs and requirements of the population.

The Conservatives have promised four

billion dollars for the creation of 200,000 new child care spaces and they have implemented a tax credit system which allows people to deduct child care from their income tax.



Liberal strategy includes creating 400,000 new child care spaces and replacing the child tax credit with a reimbursement which would result in the average family paying for a maximum of fifty per cent of day care services. Low income families would have free access.

"Quality, affordable, accessible and flexible child care to meet the needs of children, their families and their mothers" is a concise summary of the NDP's position on child care. They also advocate the expansion of maternity leave and parental leave for both the mother and father.

Keep provinces' hands off education money Meech Lake may hurt universities

by Donald MacInnis

With the exception of a brief reference to it last week by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, the Meech Lake Accord has been discreetly buried as an election issue. But what, from a student perspective, are the accord's ramifications for the future of Canada's post-secondary education?

Paul Card, National Executive Representative for Nova Scotia on the Canadian Federation of Students board and student council president of Mount Saint Vincent University, points to specific concerns of student decision-making bodies across the country in regard to Meech Lake. He underlines problems with the current federal government practice of allocating funding for universities to the provincial government through two separate systems. Federal government money, in targeted amounts, takes the form of lump sum payments and tax credits. At present, controversy exists because the quality of education can widely differ from province to province. The reason for this is that some provincial governments refuse to recognize some or all of the tax credits as being earmarked for education; and these benefits

are utilized for other government initiatives at the expense of the universities.

Card says the proposed "opt out" clause in the accord could further aggravate the present problem. The clause gives the provinces the right to opt out of national program initiatives on the condition that they administer a similar program with federal funding as long as the program meets "national standards and objectives". Card says these standards are unclear and undefined, and could lead to many contradictory interpretations by provincial governments.

(The opt-out clause is modelled after the 1960s precedent when Quebec opted out of the Canada Pension Plan in favor of administering its own use of federal money.)

Theoretically, the provinces could further reduce their financial commitments to universities and spend the federal monies elsewhere. They could contend, and possibly be supported by the courts, that they were merely following and implementing these obscure national guidelines. In these already decentralized and inconsistent systems of education,

Card says these possible interpretations of the accord could further reduce the quality of education. Program requirements and standards, as well as the value of degree programs across the country would also increase the inconsistencies between provinces, causing an academic free-for-all.

The issue has not been raised by the students' council of either Dal or Saint Mary's. However, student representatives from both universities, such as Brad Walley of Saint Mary's, have expressed their concerns over the meaning of the accord's opt-out clause. Walley says that education has received an inadequate share of attention compared to the amount of debate that has been sparked concerning the possible effects of the clause on social programs such as health care.

A debate of these concerns as well as a general rehash of the accord could be in the near future. The McKenna government's public hearings in New Brunswick, the vehement opposition to Meech Lake in Manitoba, and the outcome of the November 21 federal election could reopen this contentious can of worms and prompt consideration of the accord's effects on Canadian university education.