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| Ontario | 39e | 1e | Discours sur l’éducation | 19 novembre 2008 | John Milloy | Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities | Ontario Liberal Party |

It’s a pleasure to be here. Some of you may know I’m an alumnus of the estimates committee, having sat on the committee for two years. I have to confess there was the odd time, especially in the summer, when we used to sit for eight hours in a row, I wondered what it would be like to actually be a witness. So, I’m going to find that out today.

I’m very pleased to be here today to talk about our 2008-09 estimates, Ontario’s economy and the role the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities plays in it. First, I’d like to make mention of some senior ministry officials who are here today who may be called on from time to time to provide some technical background information. Beside me is the acting Deputy Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Marie-Lison Fougère. We also have Kevin French, the assistant deputy minister of the employment and training division; David McIntosh, senior manager, corporate resource planning and analysis; Barry McCartan, director, post-secondary finance and information management branch; and Richard Jackson, director of the student support branch and the superintendent of private career colleges. I want to begin by acknowledging the hard work, leadership and commitment to education and training this team and all our ministry staff demonstrate every day.

I think you’d agree that if Ontario is to succeed in today’s increasingly challenging and competitive global economy, we need every Ontarian to be at their best. That’s why our government is so committed to investing in the skills and knowledge of our people.

These are not times to be complacent. Our government has stepped forward with a five-point plan for Ontario’s economy. We are reducing the cost of doing business by cutting taxes and keeping Ontario among the most competitive tax jurisdictions in North America. We’re making a $60-billion commitment over 10 years to infrastructure, including our colleges and universities that are experiencing unprecedented growth. We’re partnering with businesses in key sectors to help keep them competitive and growing into the future. This includes partnering with the vital auto sector, the cornerstone of our manufacturing sector, to build the new Automotive Centre of Excellence in Oshawa and a new Centre for Engineering Innovation in Windsor, helping to ensure new investments come to Ontario. We’re focusing on innovation, recognizing that it’s the ingenuity of our people that will ensure our future success. We know that if we can provide the innovative goods and services the world needs, then the world will beat a path to our door. Fifth, and finally, we’re investing in our people. This is what I’m here as the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to focus on today.

We live in a time of economic change, and Ontario’s one competitive advantage is having a highly skilled, highly trained workforce that can compete for the best jobs in the world. On the one hand, we have an economy that’s shedding jobs. On the other hand, we have many jobs that go wanting every year for a lack of skilled workers. More than at any time before, Ontario needs to address training and education at every level, from making sure new Canadians have access to literacy and basic skills, to supporting college training and increasing apprenticeships, to supporting PhD work at the university level. The McGuinty government has a vision and a plan to ensure that every Ontarian is able to get the training and education they need to fully participate in our economy and so Ontario can continue to attract the jobs and investments that will keep our province and our people moving forward.

By supporting our colleges and universities and our skilled trades sector through a range of Employment Ontario programs, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is taking a very strategic approach to education and training. I’ll share with you some details on our various programs and initiatives.

First, training: The skilled trades sector is a critical part of Ontario’s economic well-being, especially in these trying times. The entire province relies on a strong skilled trades sector, from the individual consumer to industry and government. This government, for example, has announced its intention to commit some $60 billion to infrastructure projects over the next number of years. That’s on top of the $30-billion ReNew Ontario program that’s just wrapping up. We need skilled workers to realize those projects. Our government has been working hard to enhance Ontario’s apprenticeship system. We have increased new annual apprenticeship registration by 52% since 2003 and we’re on track to increase that by another 25% this term, to 32,500 by 2011-12. In fact, just over the summer, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities announced it will fund the creation of 4,484 new apprenticeship and skills training spaces per year, along with about 8,700 new full-time student spaces, with a $190-million investment in college capital projects.

Despite our successes, we know we need to do a better job to make sure Ontario has enough skilled workers to support our economy going forward.

Entry-level requirements for careers continue to rise, calling for higher levels of training and education. Seventy per cent of all new jobs demand some form of post-secondary education or training, yet only about half of registered apprentices are completing their training. We need to understand the challenges related to completion rates and fix them. We also need to do a better job of attracting aboriginal people, women and people with disabilities to the trades. We need to have a strong, modern skilled-trades system in place to help attract more people. We’re working to accomplish all those things by investing in Employment Ontario, expanding apprenticeship programs and creating a new college of trades.

In terms of Employment Ontario, our government invests over a billion dollars annually in this program. It offers labour market and training information and referral services in person, online and by phone in 25 languages. It serves more than 900,000 clients each year in communities across the province. Whether you need to find a job or you want to hire someone, Employment Ontario can help.

Employment Ontario responds quickly to the needs of local communities and delivers services to Ontarians when, where and how they need them. A good example is when a large layoff occurs. Within an hour of learning of a large layoff, my ministry’s rapid re-employment and training service team is working to connect local workers with Employment Ontario services.

We also set up action centres that can offer counselling, job search and training help, as well as assistance for those who want to go back to school. We’ve helped more than 50,000 people at more than 80 action centres across Ontario.

The ministry is working to integrate federal programs and services following the 2007 labour market development agreement. The LMDA transferred a number of federal programs to the province and was the catalyst for transforming Employment Ontario into a more integrated, client-focused organization. We are enhancing Employment Ontario to be more responsive to the needs of individuals and more flexible in meeting local community needs.

The changes we are implementing focus on three goals for our clients: achieving one-stop access for workers and employers, delivering services in the community where and when they are needed, and ensuring service excellence and customer satisfaction. These changes will ensure that Ontarians receive relevant skills training and employment/career planning services in as seamless a manner as possible. Ontario will continue to integrate provincial and federal services, set clear performance measures and add new features, such as local labour market planning.

For Employment Ontario to move towards achieving its service promises, we intend to introduce a new employment service model in April 2009. This new model comprises a variety of services that target the specific stages of career planning, job search and job retention. We will continue to communicate with our service partners to obtain their feedback and advice as we transform employment services to better serve Ontarians.

Job Connect is another part of Employment Ontario. It links Ontarians, including internationally trained newcomers, to employment and training opportunities. Job Connect is delivered through colleges and non-profit agencies at 132 locations in more than 80 communities across the province. Ontarians can use Job Connect to find information on careers, occupations and the local labour market. They can also get help with their job searches, career planning and on-the-job training.

Our government has helped Job Connect to grow. The expansion includes three new sites focused on helping newcomers in the greater Toronto area, as well as additional services and resources for Ontarians across the province.

In the most recent budget, we introduced Ontario’s skills to jobs action plan, which relates to the work we’re doing on the training side. This plan includes a new $1.5-billion, three-year investment which, combined with the campus renewal capital investment included in last fall’s economic outlook and fiscal review, means the government is investing $2 billion in the skills to jobs action plan. This plan will help our economy address the need for skilled workers and will help Ontarians train for new, well-paying career opportunities.

Among the aspects of the skills to jobs action plan was $560 million over three years for skills training. This included $355 million for a new, unique program called Second Career.

Second Career provides up to $28,000 per person to help people who have lost their job go back to college and train for a new career in a growing sector in their community. Since Second Career was launched in June, about 1,500 people have come forward to participate. This month, the eligibility guidelines for Second Career were expanded so we could help even more people. The program is now open to workers who were laid off as far back as January 1, 2005. Laid-off workers who have taken an interim job to make ends meet can now apply, as well. Second Career also now offers short-term training of less than six months for laid-off workers who are not eligible for employment insurance, and we’re prepared to consider additional financial assistance on an individual basis to cover such expenses as academic upgrading, living away from home while taking training, and dependant care. A cornerstone of the skills to jobs action plan, Second Career will continue to help address the retraining needs of workers affected by the downturn in the economy.

I’d now like to move to the area of apprenticeships.

Ontario’s apprenticeship system is the largest in Canada. There are over 150 trades in this province, covering the construction, industrial manufacturing, motive power, and service sectors. Apprenticeship programs provide a vital way of training workers on the job. Last year, 26,000 Ontarians registered as apprentices. That’s a 52% increase compared to six years ago, when just over 17,000 Ontarians registered. We’re committed to increasing that number to 32,500 by 2012.

Today, about 110,000 apprentices are learning a trade, nearly 50,000 more than six years ago, and more than 34,000 employers are involved in training those apprentices. Each year, more than 10,000 apprentices receive their certificates of qualification and qualify as journey-persons.

The McGuinty government has taken several steps to increase access to skilled trades and address looming skills shortages through apprenticeship training. We are investing $75 million over three years to expand the apprenticeship system and increase registration and completion rates. We are expanding the co-op diploma apprenticeship program, with an investment of $13 million this year. We are supporting pre-apprenticeship programs with the approval of new proposals this month. We are increasing the Ontario youth apprenticeship program participation, with an additional $2 million being provided to school boards. We are enhancing the apprenticeship per diem with a 2% increase, effective April 1, 2008. We are increasing support for apprentices with disabilities, providing up to $1.8 million to colleges to accommodate apprentices with disabilities.

Through our Ontario skills training enhancement program, or OSTEP, and the apprenticeship enhancement fund, we are providing $55 million over three years to colleges and training centres for infrastructure, equipment modernization, and facilities updating, to create greater training and skills upgrading capacity in Ontario.

Under the apprenticeship enhancement fund, we are investing $40 million over three years for state-of-the-art equipment for colleges to train apprentices: $10 million this year, and $15 million in each of years two and three.

For the Ontario skills training enhancement program, we are investing $15 million over three years to help training centres modernize equipment, build and update facilities, and train more workers. The new Ontario skills training enhancement program will modernize equipment and expand training centres so our people can train for tomorrow’s high-value jobs. Our government is allocating $15 million over three years for this new cost-sharing program, with training centres investing up to 50% of the related expense.

Our government has made additional investments in the apprenticeship system.

We’ve created the apprenticeship training tax credit to encourage employers to hire apprentices and extended it to January 1, 2012. First introduced in the 2004 Ontario budget, this tax credit offers employers up to $5,000 per year, per apprentice, over a three-year apprenticeship program. This has been extended to eligible apprenticeships that begin before January 1, 2012.

We are supporting out-of-school youth by expanding academic upgrading options and introducing an apprenticeship scholarship and an employer signing bonus. The 2008 budget announced the three-year, $970-million building places to learn program. As part of that initiative, we are expanding training centres and training capacity. One of our key target groups is young people still in high school, and our government has put a number of initiatives in place to keep young people in school and promote the skilled trades as a career path.

We also have programs that target people who didn’t finish high school and we’ve expanded the range of academic upgrading options available to them through initiatives like the Ontario youth apprenticeship program, or OYAP. This school-to-work transition program encourages high school students to stay in school while learning a skilled trade. It allows full-time students in grades 11 and 12 to earn co-operative education credits through work placements in skilled trades. In 2008-09, we are investing $10.25 million in OYAP, funding that will give more than 25,000 young people the opportunity to apprentice in a skilled trade.

We also offer the pre-apprenticeship training program, which helps potential entrants to the apprenticeship system develop their job skills and trade readiness so that they will be prepared to find work as apprentices. We set up this program to provide support to youth, aboriginal peoples, women and other under-represented groups, offering them the opportunity to upgrade trade-related skills so they can be eligible for an apprenticeship.

Those who left high school before graduating can also take part in the apprenticeship scholarship and employer signing bonus program. This offers participants $1,000 to return, complete upgrading courses and register as apprentices. It also provides a $2,000 signing bonus to employers who hire and train these people.

Quickly growing in popularity is the co-op diploma apprenticeship program, which offers young people the opportunity to complete a college diploma and, at the same time, register as an apprentice and work toward the provincial certificate of qualification. The program also includes business and entrepreneurship courses to help participants prepare to start their own businesses. When the co-op diploma program launched in 2004, six colleges delivered five programs to 200 participants. New programs and participant spaces have been added each year. For the current fiscal year, $10 million was approved for 25 projects representing approximately 770 new student spaces. We expanded the number of programs as well through an additional $3-million investment that means 210 new participants will be able to work toward a college diploma and a trades certificate at the same time. This program has been such a success that it is expanding every year. Next year, the government will increase its annual investment to more than $16 million, which will add almost 1,250 new spaces for students.

One of our government’s newest initiatives to support and grow the skilled trades is the creation of a new governance body for the sector, the Ontario College of Trades. We intend to introduce legislation in the spring which, if passed, will establish the College of Trades. The college was a key recommendation to arise from the compulsory certification review initiated a year ago in May. Tim Armstrong, a noted labour expert, was appointed to take a look at some of the issues we understood were holding back the skilled trades sector. Kevin Whitaker, chair of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, is talking to the sector right now and helping us to determine how the college should be structured, how it should be governed and what its various roles might be. One of the important responsibilities we would like to see the college take on is promoting the trades and helping to make sure Ontario has an adequate supply of skilled workers going forward.

Training Ontarians for the future is a critical aspect for our plans for Ontario’s economic future. Our training and apprenticeship plans that I have discussed are what our government believes will help to make the difference for our province responding to the current global economic challenges, but also to prepare Ontario for the future global economy once this current crisis passes. One of the best ways we can do that is by preparing our students for the knowledge-based economy of the future. If Ontario is to succeed in this new global economy, we must ensure our students can succeed. Today, we are not just competing with our immediate neighbours but with new competitors in India, China, Europe, South America and indeed everywhere on the planet.

We are helping to ensure our students’ success through significant investments in our colleges and universities. Our $6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan, the largest government investment in post-secondary education in more than 40 years, helped lay the foundation for an overall renewal of these vital institutions. Under Reaching Higher, we invested in capital projects, we increased operating funding and we provided significant increases in financial support for students.

As of 2008-09, operating grants to colleges and universities have increased by $1.5 billion, or by 57%, since 2002, providing more help to our post-secondary institutions so they can provide the quality education experience our students need and expect.

Sometimes investing in students means investing in bricks and mortar. Through our skills to jobs action plan, the McGuinty government is providing an additional $970 million to build places where students learn. This includes a $289.35-million investment in 22 new capital projects at universities across Ontario, including $25 million for a new School of International Studies at the University of Toronto. These investments will help Ontario’s universities meet growing enrolment and improve the learning environment on their campuses to ensure students get the best education experience possible.

To ensure colleges can keep pace with the growing demand and need for training and apprenticeship programs, we have invested $190 million for skills training to expand and build new facilities at 12 Ontario colleges. We’ve also provided our colleges with $60 million over three years, through the college equipment renewal fund, to purchase new equipment for students to train on, so that when they enter the workforce they will be fully trained on the modern equipment used in workplaces across Ontario rather than outdated equipment no longer used in the real world.

Two hundred million dollars has been invested through a new campus renewal program for all our colleges and universities to undertake energy efficiency projects and campus safety and security initiatives, as well as to renew existing infrastructure on their campuses. An additional $200 million has been invested in all Ontario universities for maintenance and renewal of university campus facilities.

These initiatives build on other recent investments to maintain and improve facilities or build new colleges. We’ve provided Ontario’s colleges with $105 million, through the college facilities investment program announced in the 2007 budget, to help maintain and improve their facilities.

We are providing a $40-million annual investment through the facilities renewal program to upgrade college and university academic buildings. We provided a one-time $30-million investment in 2006-07 through the economic stimulus package to support construction of new facilities that support enrolment growth and improve energy efficiency at colleges.

We are also investing $17 million over four years to create at least 1,750 internship opportunities through a partnership with the Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems organization, or as it’s known, MITACS—a national non-profit organization that connects students to research internship opportunities. MITACS connects students, universities and private sector businesses, promoting research partnerships and helping to grow a culture of research into Ontario business.

In the past four years, we have also funded 160 new first-year medical spaces, including 56 at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. That’s a 23% increase in first-year undergraduate and medical enrolment.

One of our government’s priorities to date has been to ensure that our students have the support systems they need to help them succeed.

Our government is committed to helping students reach their full potential so they can get that great job of their dreams and so that we can strengthen Ontario’s economy.

Over the past four years, we’ve introduced a broad range of financial assistance measures and we’ve also introduced a student access guarantee that promises that no student will be denied a post-secondary education because of a lack of funds.

Today, students in Ontario colleges and universities receive the highest amount of needs-based institutional aid in Canada.

Here are some of the facts on student assistance: Through Reaching Higher, our government is doubling our student aid investment with $358 million in new investment by 2010, and today, one in four Ontario students is eligible to receive a grant. Our government has doubled its investment in student assistance since 2003 and tripled the number of grants available. We’re providing financial assistance to roughly 150,000 students every year. OSAP default rates are at the lowest levels since measurements started. We’ve capped student debt at $7,000 per year, and we’ve capped tuition fees at an average of 5% annually under a framework we worked out with our colleges, our universities and our students.

Our government has introduced some other important financial supports, as well. We’ve introduced a new textbook and technology grant to help full-time students pay for textbooks and computers. Right now, the ministry is mailing out $150 grant cheques to full-time college and university students across Ontario. More than half a million students are eligible to receive the grant.

We’re also reaching out to help first-generation students or students who are the first in their family to go to college or university. This includes new supports for crown wards. For the first time, under our Reaching Higher plan, crown wards are receiving special support through tuition grants and application fee reinvestments.

In addition, we’ve invested almost $500,000 in four crown ward education championship teams that build local, community-based partnerships that provide improved support to crown wards.

Moving ahead—and I’ll just summarize briefly because I’m running out of time—we’ve also focused on other groups of students not always well represented in our post-secondary institutions. Over three years, we’re investing $30 million in various initiatives aimed at helping first-generation students, including bursaries for students in need, as well as support for services such as mentoring and tutoring in colleges and universities. We’re helping aboriginal students pursue and succeed in post-secondary education. We’re supporting French-language education by increasing funding to French-language support programs by 53%. We’ve also made headway on private career colleges that I’d be happy to speak about during the question and answer sessions.

Finally, I’ll end, perhaps, with our literacy strategy. Strong literacy and numeracy skills help workers to perform at a higher level, thereby strengthening our workforce and our economy. Our government is improving literacy and basic skills through an investment of nearly $75 million in 2008-09. Currently, our literacy and numeracy programs result in about seven out of 10 learners going on to further education and employment. This investment includes significant support to academic upgrading, a total of $15 million. Academic upgrading provides an alternate route to post-secondary education and training for people who have left the school system. It helps them develop their learning skills and ultimately find better jobs.

In conclusion, post-secondary education and training must remain key aspects of our government’s economic plans. This is true while addressing the immediate economic challenges facing Ontario and the world. Our skills to jobs action plan is a multifaceted, ambitious plan designed to address the needs of workers displaced by economic issues beyond their control. It is also true in planning for the emerging new global economy where having skilled, highly educated workers is key to success.

When we help our people achieve their goals, Ontario will be able to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving world and attract the investments and the jobs to our province that will keep Ontario ahead of the game. That’s why our government takes post-secondary education and training so seriously, that is why we have invested so much in the institutions that educate and train Ontarians, and that is why Ontario will be able to weather the economic challenges ahead and prosper in the new global economy.

That concludes most of my written text, which I think has been circulated. I’d be happy to answer questions about, as I say, the section I didn’t get to.