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| Ontario | 39e | 2e | Discours sur l’éducation | 26 octobre 2010 | John Milloy | Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities | Ontario Liberal Party |

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. If you’ll permit me, and I’ve said this to you privately, I do want to publicly acknowledge your support and the support of the committee. With the wonderful new addition to our family last week, the committee went to great efforts to allow my appearance to be delayed. I do want to publicly acknowledge and acknowledge on the record all that you did.

As some of you know, this is my second child. The first child had a double-barrelled name, John Patrick. I tried to convince my wife that, in light of all the support here at the Legislature, we should do the same thing, but she did not want to name our son Garfield Dalton. I think it may be because he’d be confused with all the other Garfield Daltons at his school. I do want to thank you.

I’m pleased to be here today to discuss the 2010-11 estimates for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. As is the practice, I’m accompanied by a number of senior officials from the ministry who, I imagine, will be called on from time to time to answer questions of a technical nature. I’d like to briefly introduce them. To my left is Deborah Newman, the deputy minister. We also have Marie-Lison Fougère, assistant deputy minister, strategic policy and programs; David Fulford, assistant deputy minister of corporate management and services; Laurie LeBlanc, assistant deputy minister, employment and training; and Nancy Naylor, assistant deputy minister, post-secondary education. They’re supported by another cadre of officials at the director level who, as I say, will be pleased to provide supplementary and technical information as questions arise.

I do want to say at the outset that it is a privilege for me to work with these fine individuals and with all of our ministry staff who are so dedicated to education and training. I want to thank them for the preparation that has gone into this appearance in front of the committee and, of course, the follow-up for the various questions and issues that are raised.

I last appeared before this committee two years ago. For much of the time since then, Ontario has been dealing with the effects of the global recession and the transformation of key sectors. This has been a challenge for us all. This has been a challenge for Ontario families, especially for people who, through no fault of their own, found themselves out of work.

Now the economy has shifted. Though the recovery is still in its early stages, one fact remains paramount, and that is that Ontario’s greatest strength is its people. The ideas, focus and energy of our men and women and younger generation are the bedrock of this province. In this fast-changing world, they will continue to propel Ontario forward.

Earlier this year, the McGuinty government set out a new foundation for success. Our five-year Open Ontario plan puts us on a bold, smart path to jobs and growth that is open to change, opportunities and the new economy.

A key focus of this plan is post-secondary education and training. Our government knows that a skilled, knowledgeable workforce attracts the jobs and investment that lead to a strong province and high quality of life.

Sixty-three per cent of Ontarians between the ages of 25 and 64 already have post-secondary education or apprenticeship training, which is a competitive advantage in this competitive world, but we have to do better. Seven out of every 10 new jobs created in Ontario in the next decade will require post-secondary education or training. Through Open Ontario, our government will raise the percentage of Ontarians with a post-secondary education and training credential to 70%. Every qualified Ontarian who wants to go to college or university or learn a trade will find a place.

Our aim is nothing less than to create the most skilled and knowledgeable workforce in North America; one that is ready and able to meet all the demands of the 21st century. As we take these steps, our government will build upon the success of our five-year $6.2-billion Reaching Higher plan. Reaching Higher was the largest single multi-year investment in post-secondary education and apprenticeship training in two generations. It delivered greater access and improved quality for students, greater accountability by colleges and universities and a more responsive training system.

Moving forward, our government will work with our education, training and business partners to develop a new five-year plan that will ensure the continuing quality of Ontario’s post-secondary education system. And we will continue to address training and education at every level—from helping newcomers gain access to second language training, to supporting college training and apprenticeships, to supporting graduate work at the university level—so Ontarians can be at their very best and our province can be at its strongest.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities takes a strategic approach to education and training. Let me begin with colleges and universities. Ontario has 20 public universities, including the two newest: Sault Ste. Marie’s Algoma University, which opened in 2008, and Toronto’s OCAD University, which received its designation this year. As well, we have 24 public colleges in the province. It has been my privilege to visit most, if not all, of these facilities and meet and be inspired by the students. They are training to be doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, technicians—individuals who will excel in a thousand and one careers and will propel our province and our future. Our commitment is to help them succeed.

In 2010, our ministry is investing more than $4.7 billion into operating grants for colleges and universities. This is the eighth consecutive year in which these grants have increased. This continuing investment has allowed us to transform the sector to meet the needs of the new economy and to give more Ontarians access to the programs and courses they need to succeed.

Today, about 140,000 more students are attending Ontario’s colleges and universities than in 2002-03. That’s a 36% increase, and these numbers are only going higher. Post-secondary enrolment is growing five times faster than it did in the 1990s; 40% of 18- to 24-year-olds are enrolled in college or university today, up from 35% in 2002.

Just as important, students are experiencing better success and higher graduation rates, and when they do graduate, they’re getting good jobs fast. Some 79% of undergraduate students are now completing university, up from 73% in 2002. A recent study found that 94% of students who graduated university in 2006 were employed within six months of graduation, 96% were employed within two years and 85% were employed in careers related to their program of study.

Still more are carrying on with their education. Today, almost 13,600 more students are registered in graduate school than in 2002—an increase of 54%. More students are graduating from our public colleges. Today, 65% of college students are graduating compared to 57% in 2002. And even during a challenging market, almost 85% of the class of 2009 found employment within six months.

To facilitate these successes, our government has invested in bricks and mortar. Since 2003, more than $3.5 billion has been allocated to capital projects on university and college campuses, including up-to-date classrooms, labs and facilities. Forty-nine infrastructure projects announced in 2009 are currently under way, supported by $981 million in provincial funds, complemented by investments from the federal government. These projects will enable Ontario colleges and universities to modernize. It will also give them the facilities and boost the province’s long-term research and skills training capacity that is needed.

Seven institutions have received capital support through Ontario’s strategic capital infrastructure program.

Through the college equipment and renewal fund, we’ve invested $60 million over three years to help colleges acquire new instructional equipment. Students must be able to leave school and enter the workforce having been trained on the latest technology and ready to do the job.

We gave colleges and universities a one-time investment of $155 million in 2009-10 in additional operating funding to support the larger number of enrolments and to improve sustainability. All these investments help to support the learning experience.

In this regard too, we are facilitating and building upon a strong base. Ontario students have positive things to say, not only about the colleges and universities they attend, but also about the post-secondary learning experience. Seventy-nine per cent of Ontario’s university undergraduates rate their educational experience as good to excellent. Fully 78% say that if they were to start all over again, they would still choose their same university. Seventy-six per cent of college students express satisfaction with their alma mater, up from 75% in 2003, and 80% were pleased with the quality of learning experience within their program of study. We work hard with our partners to improve the learning experience and to make change happen.

For example, a key commitment is to improve students’ ability to navigate the post-secondary education system, including giving them more flexibility to move between colleges and universities as their needs and goals change. That’s why our government will provide additional resources towards the implementation of a credit transfer system.

I want to recognize the contribution of an important group of individuals who have provided solid advice to the ministry during this time of change and expansion. I’m talking about the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, or HEQCO. The council is an arm’s-length body of the government. It provides us with research-based advice on how to improve the quality of and accessibility to our colleges and universities. It helps us develop best practices for accountability from our institutions, so that we will know that students and taxpayers are well served.

HEQCO provides a sounding board on how to best improve the quality of Ontario’s post-secondary education system. Its work encourages open dialogue and collaboration between the government, colleges, universities and all those who have an interest in improving Ontario’s post-secondary education system. It helps us to respond to labour market needs and to be competitive internationally.

The council’s 2010-11 research priorities, as set out in their third annual review and research plan, encompass accessibility, quality, accountability and sustainability in our post-secondary system over the long term. Those issues are critical for maintaining a healthy post-secondary education system that responds to students and serves the province.

I spoke earlier of our Open Ontario plan to raise Ontario’s post-secondary attainment rate to 70%; to ensure that every qualified Ontarian who wants to go to college or university will find a place. This plan includes supporting an additional 20,000 spaces in colleges and universities this year: that’s the equivalent of a whole new University of Guelph. Our government has provided $310 million in 2010-11 to support these spaces. These 20,000 more students will make an important difference to the future of Ontario.

Similarly, we remain on track to create 15,000 new graduate student spaces by 2011-12, compared to 2002-03. Our $221.6-million investment includes an additional $51.6 million by 2011-12 to support the final 3,300 spaces and complete the expansion. Overall, there will be 62% more graduate student places in Ontario next year than in 2002.

This expansion is helping to develop the top talent Ontario needs to conduct cutting-edge research and translate innovative ideas into the solutions that will, in turn, lead to new investments, new businesses and new jobs. Our government has invested $142 million since 2005 to expand graduate fellowships and we continue to support 1,750 graduate research internships through our four-year, $17-million partnership with MITACS.

These internships link Ontario companies with universities and involve graduate students in real-world research projects, including in science and engineering, health and life sciences, arts, social sciences and business.

Our government has also followed through on our commitment to graduate more doctors and nurses. By 2011-12, we will have created 260 new first-year medical school spaces, up 38% from 2003. To facilitate this expansion and to train more doctors in more communities, we created the Northern Ontario School of Medicine as well as new medical education campuses in Waterloo region, St. Catharines and Windsor, with a fourth campus scheduled to open in Mississauga in 2011.

In 2009—and going forward—we provided $20 million to help all of Ontario’s medical schools continue to provide an innovative curriculum, and we are providing $35 million over three years to help build the specialized rooms, labs and equipment needed for training. The number of first-year, full-time degree nursing students has also increased: up by 27% since 2005.

An excellent post-secondary education system must ensure that students have the support they need to attend and succeed. Our government has introduced a wide range of measures that focus on financial assistance, including a student access guarantee that promises that no qualified student will be denied a post-secondary education because of lack of funds. According to a report by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Ontario is now providing record levels of non-repayable assistance and Ontario institutions were found to be more generous than other Canadian institutions in providing need-based aid.

We have accomplished this through major improvements to the Ontario student assistance program, or OSAP. This year, 210,000 students will benefit. More students from low- and middle-income families are receiving grants, more students are getting higher assistance levels and more students are being supported in managing and repaying their loans. And as part of Open Ontario, our government provided an additional $81 million this year to further expand and modernize the program.

Let me highlight some of the improvements:

Allowances provided for books, supplies and equipment will now be adjusted for inflation annually to ensure they better reflect the real costs to students and their families.

Students can keep more of the money they earn from part-time jobs without it affecting their OSAP funding.

Weekly loan maximums have also been increased. They are now $150 per week for single students and $350 per week for married students and students with children.

Also for married students, we have reduced the share of income that spouses are required to contribute to their partner’s income by 10% and doubled the OSAP vehicle exemption to $10,000.

There will be a new grant for part-time students, and the number of Ontario graduate scholarships will be increased by 1,000, to a total of 3,000 to be awarded every year.

Other changes focus on repayment, and I do want to recognize that students take their repayment responsibilities seriously. The Ontario student loan default rate was 8% last year. That was the lowest rate since the province began measuring defaults in 1997, when it was 23%.

Going forward, our government has made the Ontario portion of all OSAP loans interest-free and payment-free for six months after graduation. Under the new repayment assistance program, or RAP, no graduate in financial difficulty will be asked to pay more than 20% of their family income towards their loans, and after 15 years, any remaining student loan debt will be forgiven.

We’ve also streamlined application processes so students can get their financial support faster and can focus more quickly on their studies.

Our government is committed to ensuring that post-secondary education in Ontario remains affordable. We’ve extended the cap on tuition fee increases to an average of 5% annually for two more years, and we work hard to ensure access to the system by all of Ontario’s diverse learners all across the province.

Currently, for example, 19,000 French-language students and new learners are taking 249 programs through Ontario’s French-language colleges and universities. These numbers have grown from 18,000 and 213, respectively, in 2003. In fact, funding for French-language post-secondary education topped $84 million in 2009-10, 64% more than in 2003.

Ontario operates a bursary program to help aboriginal students in financial need attend post-secondary education. We fund a range of support services to improve the everyday experience and achievement levels of aboriginal students in post-secondary education and training opportunities.

We also provide help to students with disabilities. This year, we allocated $8 million in access-to-opportunities funding to help students with disabilities succeed in their post-secondary studies.

And crown wards continue to be an important focus. Our government has provided new supports, including doubling the number of crown ward education championship teams in Ontario to 14. These teams do outstanding work in mentoring, motivating and guiding crown wards along a successful educational path.

We have also provided $19 million over four years to help expand the Pathways to Education program beyond Regent Park to other priority neighbourhoods in the GTA and throughout Ontario. This innovative program has been very successful in reaching out and helping youth stay in school and realize their potential.

Our government also reaches out to first generation students. From 2008 to 2010, 42 colleges and universities delivered initiatives that offered advice and supports to first generation students. Decisions on a new round of initiatives for 2010 to 2012 will be announced shortly.

Preparing our students for today’s knowledge-based and global economy is a critical responsibility. The steps I have described, which focus on the quality and accessibility of our colleges and universities, are imperative to a strong Ontario.

Strengthening our skilled trade sector is equally important. All across Ontario, in every community, skilled workers help to grow our businesses. They build and maintain our public and private infrastructure. Their skills and experience ensure Ontario’s competitiveness in a global economy. We must have enough skilled workers to support our economy going forward.

Our government is reaching out to all Ontarians, including unemployed and older workers, newcomers, women, aboriginal people and people with disabilities, to make them aware of the opportunities that are available in the trades. We are modernizing and enhancing our skilled trade system to ensure that it aligns with the needs of our economy. And we are accomplishing these goals via the transformation of Employment Ontario, skills training for new opportunities, a focus on apprenticeship, and through the newly established Ontario College of Trades.

The dual effects of the shifting economy and the global recession have affected many of Ontario’s workers. People need to upgrade their skills, learn new trades or gain better proficiency in literacy in order to find jobs in a changing workplace. Many have turned to Employment Ontario, which offers training information and job search assistance in person, online and by phone in 25 languages. Our government has increased our investment in Employment Ontario to more than $1.6 billion in each of the past two years. As a result, we have helped more than one million people annually. And we continue to transform the organization to be more integrated and client-focused.

In August, we took a big step forward with a new one-stop approach. Employment Ontario employment service offices now offer, in one location, all the services people need to help with resumé preparation, career and training planning, job matching and placement opportunities, and advice on finding a job that is right for them. Employers also benefit. They can visit any Employment Ontario employment service office if they wish to hire new employees, help existing employees build skills, or obtain labour market information.

Another part of the Employment Ontario transformation has focused on delivering services to communities when and where they are needed. For example, my ministry’s rapid re-employment and training services team provides an immediate and appropriate response in any large layoff situation. Within one hour, our team is working to connect workers with Employment Ontario services. Our collective goal is to help laid-off workers get back on their feet faster.

Employment Ontario also seamlessly operates federal-provincial initiatives such as the three-year, $58-million targeted initiative for older workers program. This initiative is helping unemployed older workers with programming that increases that employability, reintegrates them into employment and ensures that they remain active and productive participants in the labour market while their communities undergo economic change. We will continue to work with our Employment Ontario partners to ensure service excellence and customer satisfaction.

Two years ago, our government launched a new program, Second Career, the first of its kind in Canada to help laid-off, unemployed workers train for careers in high-demand sectors. Second Career has been highly successful. To date, over 36,000 workers have benefited. In fact, our goal of helping 20,000 people over three years was exceeded in only 16 months.

This program provides up to $28,000 per person to help unemployed, laid-off workers acquire the skills training that will assist them to find employment. For persons with disabilities, the current maximum agreement of $28,000 can be exceeded.

In the 2010 Ontario budget, the government reaffirmed its commitment to help laid-off workers by making Second Career a permanent program. By the end of 2011-12, we anticipate about 58,000 people will have benefited from the program.

We know the program is working. Each day, the ministry hears of people who have started a new job thanks to Second Career. There’s Jana Tavares, who was laid off as an accounts receivable administrator. Now she’s working as a medical office assistant at a cardiology lab in Hamilton. There’s Cathy Cope. In the spring of 2008, she was laid off from her job as an administrator and bookkeeper. Her husband was laid off at the same time. Second Career gave Cathy the opportunity to train as a career and work counsellor at George Brown College. She graduated her course and is today working at a Goodwill agency helping other people find education, training and jobs.

Second Career is changing lives for the better. A survey of Second Career students shows that 93% of students have graduated, and 61% have found jobs within an average of three months.

We’re helping Ontarians prepare their skills and education for the jobs of the future. Certainly, the new economy presents exciting opportunities. Our government has focused on green energy and aims to be a global leader in this emerging sector. We’ve invested $5 million over two years to ensure Ontarians obtain the skills and training for the high-value green jobs being created. We’re also investing $45 million over three years in a skills training program to help aboriginal people and northern Ontarians benefit from significant resource development opportunities, including in the area known as the Ring of Fire.

A key part of our plan to strengthen skilled trades is to boost the profile of apprenticeship and reach out to potential apprentices. These efforts have paid off. Today, more than 120,000 apprentices across the province are learning over 150 trades in four sectors: construction, industrial/manufacturing, motive power, and service. This is twice as many apprentices as were registered in Ontario in 2003. To support them best, our government has enhanced Ontario’s apprenticeship system. We work with our educational partners to ensure programs meet the needs of apprentices, employers and the new economy.

We’ve provided $55 million over three years through the apprenticeship enhancement fund and the Ontario skills training enhancement program so that colleges and training centres can increase their capacity and obtain the most up-to-date equipment, facilities and infrastructure.

And we offer more incentives for more employers to take on apprentices and support programs that set more Ontarians on the road to receiving their certificate of qualification. For example, the Ontario youth apprenticeship program is helping students begin apprenticeship training while still in high school. In 2009, more than 25,000 young people from 71 district school boards participated in this program.

Our government has also strengthened the future of apprenticeship by establishing the Ontario College of Trades. The college of trades is the first of its kind in Canada. It is a regulatory college that will build on the strengths of Ontario’s skilled trades and apprenticeship system. It will encourage more people to work in the trades and help the system better serve employers, skilled tradespeople, apprentices and consumers. It will give industry a greater role in recruitment, governance, certification and apprenticeship training, and it will put skilled trades on a similar footing with teachers, doctors and nurses, who already have professional colleges.

The first steps have been taken. In May, our government announced eight industry leaders who will make appointments to the governance boards and act as the transitional board of governors.

On September 24, 2010, we announced that Scott Macivor had been hired as a special advisor to the board. He will work with the transitional board of governors to bring together personnel and help put in place the policy and procedures for the college.

On October 20, 2010, the ninth and final member for the appointments council was nominated by cabinet, and the review and approval of this nominee by the standing committee and the Lieutenant Governor is expected shortly.

The Ontario College of Trades is being phased in and will be fully operational in 2012.

Post-secondary education and training is a critical component of our Open Ontario plan for the future. A highly skilled, highly knowledgeable workforce is key to our success in a global economy.

Ontarians must be able to reach their full potential and contribute at their best for Ontario to be at its very best.

That is why our government encourages and supports education and training. That’s why we continue to invest in a post-secondary education and training system that is modern, accessible and responsive, and that is why Ontario will continue to compete and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

That concludes my opening comments. Mr. Chair, I look forward to the comments and questions of all the members of the committee, unless you’re going to tell me I have 10 minutes left, at which point I can—

A minute left. Well, we’ll stop there.