

The Honourable Paul Martin, MP
Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

December 22, 2004

Dear Prime Minister Paul Martin:

My name is Carolyn and I am an Athabasca University student in the province of Manitoba where I live. But I'm not just a University student, I am also a single mother, living far below the poverty line, who for the last 9 years has worked only minimum wage jobs and struggled to put food on the table, who wants more than anything in this world the chance to be able to afford post-secondary education. Not just for me, but for other students in this country as well.

Mr. Prime Minister I have but one question to ask you:

Should economic status determine one's intellectual potential in this country?

The reason I ask is because after applying for and receiving a full-time Canada student loan last year I was unable to study full-time because the cost of living for myself and my daughter far exceeded the rather small amount of money I was given in my loan. I had no choice but to seek employment or else I would have been evicted from my apartment and both my daughter and me forced into a women's shelter.

Working almost full-time (at minimum wage) and studying full-time and being a single parent is something not even Wonder Woman could handle I'm sure. Thus I ended up failing my courses. Not because I was unintelligent Mr. Prime Minister. I graduated with honours at River East Collegiate and was an outstanding student. It was because *I wasn't given enough financial aid* so that I could complete my courses and have enough to live on. Now I have a substantial student loan I am currently in the process of paying off, and absolutely nothing to show for it. I am even worse off now than I was before. Yet I am not alone. Thousands upon thousands of students in this province and in this country have had to seek employment because their loans were not sufficient enough and they ended up dropping out or failing their courses as a result.

Mr. Prime Minister, don't Canadian students deserve affordable tuition? Don't all Canadians deserve access to post-secondary education? Education is a right to all citizens in this country no matter their economic or social status, gender or skin colour. But soon it will only be a privilege for those who can afford it.

I love this country. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world. I look at programs such as the National Child Benefit program and the Millennium Scholarship and I think they are steps in the right direction. Mr. Prime Minister, I know that you want to see more Doctors, Nurses, Scientists, Teachers, people that are a tremendous asset to our country, but we are going to lose out on so many of these future potential contributors to our society if we begin to allow money to determine who will have the chance to succeed and who will not. Some of our greatest Canadians came from poor families, doctors, teachers, and even politicians. They succeeded because they had the drive, but more importantly because someone gave them a chance. Please be that someone Mr. Prime Minister for the sake of our country's future post-secondary students. It's one of the best investments this government could ever make.

My Member of Parliament, **Mrs. Joy Smith** for the Kildonan-St.Paul area is just such a person. She saw in me the enormous potential that others never saw and gave me a chance. We need more Members like her in Parliament. She is an example to all, and gives me hope for this country.

For your next Federal budget I hope that post-secondary education can become accessible to all in the lowering of tuition costs. At the same time I think new programs need to be created and implemented for single parent students (like myself) so that they can qualify for additional funding geared specifically for their economic situation on top of the student aid they would receive so that they can have a chance to complete their studies and have enough money to provide necessities such as food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their children while they study. Single parent students deserve a chance too Mr. Prime Minister.

I thank you for your time, and I hope with all that is in me as a Canadian citizen, a post-secondary student, a mother and a Person, that you will consider my petition.

Yours Truly,



CC: Athabasca University Student's Union

CC: Mrs. Joy Smith, MP

CC: Hon. Peter Bjornson, MLA (Minister of Education, Citizenship, & Youth)

CC: Hon. Diane McGifford, MLA (Minister of Advanced Education & Training)