Ongoing/Continuing Work

1. UCRU Lobby Week

Last week President Jakob Sanderson and I participated in UCRU’s federal lobby week on Parliament Hill.

Altogether nine U15 schools participated and we met with over 70 MPs and stakeholders; Jakob and I combined for 28 meetings including meetings with three ministers, an opposition party leader and house leader of the official opposition.

Throughout the week we discussed increasing upfront grants for post-secondary education, opening up opportunities for international students to enter the workforce, expanding undergraduate research, and implementing the calls to action of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to increase funding for Indigenous students and Indigenous course content. Throughout the week meetings included the following:

- Marwan Tabbara, MP Kitchener South
- Candice Bergen, Portage-Lisgar MP and Conservative House Leader
- Leah Gazan, MP Winnipeg Centre
- Matthew Green, MP Hamilton Centre
- Ted Falk, MP Provencher
- Marty Morantz, MP Charleswood-St.James and Shadow Minister for National Revenue
- Raquel Dancho, MP Kildonan-St.Paul & Shadow Minister for Diversity, Inclusion and Youth
- Staff Member for Dan Vandal, MP St.Boniface-St.Vital and Minister of Northern Affairs
- Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous relations
- Jennifer O’Connell MP Pickering-Uxbridge
- Jagmeet Singh, NDP Party Leader

In each meeting we discussed each of the four asks with particular focus on topics of interest and/or expertise. After each meeting with an MP a follow-up was requested including either a letter to the minister, speaking in favour of our asks in question period, sending our asks to the finance department, or some other form of endorsement.

Our 4 asks included the following:

Firstly, a call to eliminate the tuition tax credit and divert the estimated $1.8 billion in unclaimed tax credits to upfront grants to be administered through the Canada Student Grant Program, while ensuring a percentage of these grants are earmarked for students most in need.
Secondly, a proposal for fast-tracking international students into the workforce through eligibility changes to the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) Express Entry program—a pathway many international students use to apply for permanent residency status—to allow for work integrated learning opportunities and entrepreneurship to count towards skilled-work needed to apply for permanent residency, as well as establishing a federal awareness and retention program that will work to ensure that both current and prospective international students have the tools and support they need to navigate the pathways to PR in a way that best fits their needs.

Good existing models include the Atlantic Study and Stay program, Northern & Rural Pilot Program and Federal Start-Up Visa that connects young business-minded folks who are interested in entrepreneurship, with investors in the private sector as a way to establish a business and gain PR.

Thirdly, in order to provide equitable post-secondary education opportunities for Indigenous learners, we’ve asked the federal government to do the following:

- Increase funding for the PSSSP and create a long term strategy with Indigenous students and organizations on how the program should be administered, in accordance with Call to Action 11 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC);
- Ensure funding is equally accessible to students both on and off reserve and publish an annual report on progress in this area, in accordance with Calls to Action 8 and 9 of the TRC;
- Commit to fostering programs that include Indigenous language revitalization projects; call for more Indigenous language offerings in post-secondary institutions, in accordance with Call to Action 16 of the TRC;
- Focus on developing more opportunities for Indigenous knowledge practices to make their way into classrooms by providing funding and resources to post-secondary institutions to establish and improve Indigenous studies departments, in accordance with Call to Action 62 of the TRC.

And finally, our fourth ask focused on strengthening the Undergraduate Student Research Awards (URSA) program—where currently undergrads are given funding to conduct 16-week research projects under the supervision of an experienced researcher—to include 3,800 new spots for recipients in the social sciences, humanities (SSHRC) and health sciences (CHIR).

Currently, students outside of natural sciences and engineering fields are ineligible to apply which blocks off many students wanting to pursue research in essential areas such as mental health, communities and climate change. Social sciences and humanities knowledge can contribute to national debate, address the challenges of today and tomorrow, and produce new intellectual, economic, social and cultural value to answer important questions such as: How will a changing climate affect Canada’s coastal regions and northern communities? Which kinds of infrastructural investments offer the greatest benefit to our growing cities? How do we restore and maintain
positive relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians, in support of a shared successful future? Additionally, we asked that each of these awards be increased to $15/hour when broken down, as opposed to the current ~$9.50/hour to help ensure that financial barriers are not among the reasons for students not pursuing these opportunities.

We look forward to continued work with the federal government to ensure these proposals become a reality for students at UofM and across the country. For more details on our recommendations, check out https://umsu.ca/news/storming-the-hill-lobbying-mps-for-post-secondary-student-interests/ and/or email vpa@umsu.ca.

**Meetings & Events:**

- Feb 1st-7th UCRU Lobby Week, Ottawa
- Feb 10th – Mtg with Vice-Provost Students
- Feb 10th-12th – UPASS Referendum Tabling
- Feb 10th – PEP-AH Phone Mtg
- Feb 11th SAAC Mtg
- Feb 12th RWLE/SV Steering Cte.
- Feb 12th – Senate Exec Mtg
- Feb 12th Research & Advocacy Mtg
- Feb 13th-26th Out Of Office

*Out Of Office Notice* Please note that from Feb 13th-26th I will out of office and will have limited access to correspondence. In the meantime, any urgent matters can be directed to Kyle.Heibert@umsu.ca. If you have an individual advocacy concern that requires a prompt response, please visit the Student Advocacy Office, 520 UMSU University Centre or email student_advocacy@umanitoba.ca. Thank you in advance for your patience during this time! 😊