

Speaking Notes

for

John Milloy

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

To

The Canadian Club

InterContinental Toronto Hotel – Ballroom

(225 Front Street West)

Monday, January 18, 2010

11:45 am

Check Against Delivery

Thank you for that kind introduction and I want to say what a pleasure it is to be back at the Canadian Club.

I want to acknowledge all of the leaders in the field of training and post-secondary education here today.

And I want to thank the Canadian Club as well as our sponsors – Colleges Ontario, the International Brotherhood of Electrical workers and the Council of Ontario Universities.

Ladies and gentlemen, almost five years ago to the day, former Ontario Premier Bob Rae presented a seminal report on Ontario's post-secondary education and training system.

That report set into motion the Reaching Higher Plan – a policy and funding framework that helped transform Ontario's system of colleges, universities and apprenticeship training.

Today – as we look back on the past five years and all that has been accomplished, we have a lot to celebrate and a great deal to boast about.

In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that Ontario can claim one of the finest post-secondary education and training systems on earth.

Why does that matter?

As everyone in this room knows, Ontario's economy is undergoing some huge structural changes.

Advantages of the past – low wages, a low dollar, cheap commodities – are increasingly becoming less important as we compete internationally.

Many of us speak with pride about how well our grandparents did with only an elementary school education – or how our parents thrived with only high school.

It's no secret that that is no longer enough to support a strong economy in today's global market place.

Seventy per cent of new jobs require higher education and if we want the jobs, we've got to be smarter, we've got to be better trained and we've got to be better educated than the next guy.

That post-secondary education was going to be a fundamental ingredient in attracting – and indeed keeping – jobs in Ontario is something Premier McGuinty recognized soon after our government was first elected.

And it was with jobs and Ontario's economic future in mind that the Premier asked Bob Rae to examine Ontario's higher education system and propose a blueprint for the future.

When he tabled his report in 2005, Mr. Rae pointed to a post-secondary education system characterized by what he called "benign neglect"

.... plagued by skyrocketing tuition, dwindling government investments, stagnant completion rates, aging facilities and little accountability.

Our colleges, universities and training centres were lagging behind.

Bob gave us some good advice on how to fix the system, but his bottom line was that if Ontario was going to be a leader economically, we needed to be a leader in learning.

This was music to the ears of the Premier – and a few other important individuals who are with us here today.

One is my predecessor, former Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Mary Anne Chambers. Mary Anne shared the Premier's passion for post-secondary excellence and helped transform Mr. Rae's report into a concrete policy package called Reaching Higher.

When Mary Anne was asked to take on the role of Minister of Children and Youth Services, her mission was picked another person who is with us today – my immediate predecessor, Chris Bentley, who helped drive the early implementation of the program.

Another important actor in this drama was the man with the money – former Finance Minister Greg Sorbara.

With the full support of the Premier, Greg had the political courage to make Reaching Higher a cornerstone of his 2005 budget.

He introduced a five-year, \$6.2 billion plan to transform the sector within Ontario – the largest single multi-year investment in post-secondary education and apprenticeship training in two generations.

Greg, Mary Anne, Chris, here we are five years later and I'm so pleased you could be here today to see what we have to show for your hard work.

The most important result out of Reaching Higher – bar none – is that we have 100,000 more students in our post-secondary education system than we did when we took office.

I often throw that number out almost as an aside, but to put it in perspective, 100,000 more students is the equivalent of adding another University of Toronto and another Ryerson.

As well as growing the number of students - the Reaching Higher plan also gave them access to one of the most generous financial assistance programs in the country.

You know I am old enough to remember the time when you applied to school and might – depending on your situation – expected to get a government grant at the start of the semester.

Do you realize those grants – up-front grants as they are called - were phased out about 17 years ago?

Reaching Higher not only brought those grants back, but it increased the number of students who could get one – as well as substantially enhancing our student loan system as well.

In fact, this year alone – we are providing Ontario's students with \$650 million in assistance.

That's a 250% increase in the amount of financial support since we launched Reaching Higher.

There has been a 40 per cent increase in the number of students receiving financial support since we took office.

And that doesn't factor in the tens of thousands of Ontarians we support through retraining programs.

I would argue that although grants and loans are crucial – the real lynchpin of our student support system is something called the Student Access Guarantee – a promise to every student in Ontario - by government, colleges and universities – that they will not be prevented from going to college or university because of a lack of financial assistance.

Student support of course is not just about dollars.

For Ontario to stay ahead of our business competitors, we need all of our people at their best. And that means making sure our education system reaches out to include everyone.

Reaching Higher targeted both programs and financial supports to under-represented groups – so that Aboriginal students, francophone students who wanted to study in French, students with disabilities and first generation students – those who are the first in their families to pursue post-secondary education – had better access to colleges and universities.

These strategies are working.

Over the last five years, for example, the number of students with disabilities attending public colleges and universities has increased by almost 30 per cent.

We also turned our attention to making sure students were getting the highest quality learning experience we could offer.

As a starting point, we significantly increased operating funding to our colleges and universities by about \$1.7 billion, or 63 per cent, since we took office.

And we didn't forget bricks and mortar....

Government's capital investments in buildings and equipment over the last several years total in the billions.

We helped colleges and universities expand physically and to build the up-to-date labs, facilities and modern infrastructure they need to train students for the jobs of the future.

By the end of next year, we'll have built well over 40,000 new spaces for students at colleges, universities and training centres.

Reaching Higher also took steps to create more spaces for Masters and Ph.D. students.

By the time Reaching Higher's graduate studies' investments are fully rolled out, we will have more than 15,000 new graduate spaces in Ontario – the equivalent of the student population of the University of Windsor.

Not only are these graduate students receiving a valuable education but they are also part of an important piece of Ontario's research infrastructure – and I would be remiss as Minister of Research and Innovation if I didn't congratulate our universities on their tremendous successes in the research field.

Since the Ministry of Research and Innovation was created in 2005, the McGuinty government has invested over \$754 million in research projects at universities across Ontario.

Our universities are helping make important breakthroughs in everything from stem cell research to quantum physics.

Our colleges are doing terrific research work as well, helping businesses respond to a changing economy.

For example, MRI supports CONII – the Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation. A growing number of our colleges are involved in applied research through CONII in areas like technology transfer and product development - areas that are making an important difference for their partners in the business sector.

We have a lot to brag about in Ontario – but one of the key questions increasingly asked about every government investment – including Reaching Higher – is are we getting value for money?

How do we assure students, potential employers, parents and indeed, the taxpayers of Ontario that these investments are truly paying off?

Here again, Bob Rae provided us with some good advice on how to bring better accountability to our work.

Besides giving our institutions a reliable five-year funding schedule so they could plan ahead, he recommended the negotiation of individual accountability agreements with each institution setting targets and measuring progress in a number of key areas.

We followed Mr. Rae's advice and over the past number of years have received annual reports from all our colleges and universities on the progress that they have been making. Combined with some additional measurement tools, they tell quite a story.

We know that graduation rates have increased significantly both at the college and university level

...And that 80 per cent or more of our students are satisfied with their education.

We know post-secondary enrolment is growing five times faster than it did in the 1990s.

We know that the number of graduate students at Ontario universities has increased by 48 per cent in just over five years.

And we know that by the end of March, our public and private colleges will have welcomed about 28,000 laid-off workers through our new Second Career retraining program.

Strengthening the third pillar of post-secondary education – skilled trades training and apprenticeship – is an equally important ingredient in keeping Ontario ahead of the competition.

Because Ontario's future prosperity relies heavily on our ability to build wind turbines and fix bridges and build mass transit.

Staying ahead of the competition means making sure Ontario can replace the tradespeople who are retiring over the next few years.

It means making sure our tradespeople are ahead of the competition when it comes to state-of-the-art technology...

The new College of Trades is one of the most important steps Ontario has ever taken to attract more people to the trades and to ensure a strong sector in the years ahead. We're creating this new self-regulatory body to make sure Ontario has the apprentices and high-quality training system to lead us into the future.

We've taken a number of other steps as well, providing additional investments to our colleges as well as our Employer and Union training centres – to train more apprentices and to upgrade their facilities and purchase state of the art equipment. We have also introduced incentives for both apprentices and employers to help more people get into – and complete – a trade and to encourage more employers to train.

The results are undeniable: we've got 120,000 apprentices training in our province today.

That's double the number that was learning a trade when we took office.

And I want to acknowledge all of our training and apprenticeship partners – colleges, trades unions and employers who have done extremely well in helping us make sure that we don't lose the skilled talent Ontario relies upon.

There's another group with us today that also does important work in training and education and I want to recognize the representatives from the private career college sector and acknowledge the important contribution that they make to the system.

Many of you will be surprised to know this, but Ontario is home to over 400 private career colleges. These colleges offer vocational training to about 30,000 students in 70 communities across the province.

I came here today because I wanted to tell an exciting story about all we've accomplished together over the past five years.

We've done a great job so far, but we have to do even better if we are to continue to out-educate the competition in the years ahead.

Government is heading into some challenging fiscal times.

We're facing a deficit of more than \$24 billion.

Tough choices will have to be made.

But I think everyone in the room knows of our Premier's unwavering commitment to education – from junior kindergarten to colleges, universities and apprenticeship training.

Our government will also remember that despite the many players involved in this system – at its core, it is always about the student.

And for the students here with us today, I want to assure you that I've listened carefully to your concerns and that we're going to continue to work with our colleges, universities and our training partners to maintain standards of excellence and ensure that their programs are preparing you for the jobs of the future.

We'll work together to welcome a growing number of students and to make sure under-represented groups receive the support they need.

We will continue to find a way to ensure that students are not denied an education because of finances.

One concern I often hear from students is about the challenge of easily moving between the college and university system and receiving appropriate credit for the work they have accomplished and the skills they have learned.

We have been working for several months with our colleges; universities and students to develop a formal credit transfer system.

There is a lot of work to be done, but you will see us start to roll out an effective system of credit transfers later this year.

I have also heard from students and their parents – that they want more accountability in the system.

Earlier I talked about the agreements we have with our institutions and some of the ways we measure progress.

Although these agreements are technically public – they remain very much “inside baseball” as the old saying goes. I want to take them out of the ball park, make them more available to the public, and give students, parents, grandparents – everyone – a tool that lets them know how their local institution is progressing and how their tuition fees and tax dollars are being invested.

A few final thoughts that I want everyone to take away today....

I’m very, very proud of Ontario’s post-secondary sector

...And of what we’ve accomplished together over the course of Reaching Higher.

I’m proud to be part of a post-secondary education sector that ranks among the best in the world.

There are countless examples I could offer, but to name just a few...

...The University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo made *Newsweek’s* Top 100 Global Universities index

...York University’s Schulich School of Business is ranked 8th in the world for financial services education

...Wireless and Telecommunications Technology students at Humber College made history last year by becoming the first college-level students to make live voice contact with an astronaut aboard the International Space Station

...Niagara College has Canada’s first and only commercial teaching winery, producing award-winning wines.

I could go on all afternoon about our tremendous accomplishments. Our institutions have thousands of good news stories. Instead, I encourage you to talk to the college and university presidents who are here today and let them tell you themselves.

Let me say finally that it’s been a great pleasure working with all of you over the last two years.

I look forward to working with all of you in the months ahead as we continue to strengthen one of the best post-secondary education and training systems on earth.