

AUCC Speech
(meeting with Atlantic MP's & Senators)
March 5, 1997

-thank you for the wonderful news in the budget about federal support for research infrastructure through the Canadian Foundation for Innovation & renewal of the Centres of Excellence funding.

-lots of material in the book on research activities and their impact.

-from the point of view of Atlantic Canadian universities these announcements are extremely positive, but a crucial question remains to be answered about how the infrastructure program will operate - your help in ensuring that it works to the benefit of Atlantic Canada's universities will be very important.

-here's our situation and our problem - Atlantic Canada has a highly rationalized and efficient research infrastructure

-on one hand there is considerable specialization - 3 Universities (Dalhousie Memorial & UNB) account for over 80% of externally funded research - these 3 are also the region's 3 comprehensive graduate schools.

-important for me to say that good & important research goes on at the many smaller primarily undergraduate institutions in Atlantic Canada - this research also plays a key role in enhancing the academic experience for undergraduates who get a chance to participate in serious projects.

-depending on how the rules for competition for research infrastructure funding are drawn by the Foundation for Innovation, Atlantic Canadian universities may find it very difficult to compete for these infrastructure funds

-if the rules focus primarily on graduate based research projects, the small undergraduate institutions may find themselves shut out

-moreover, in such a regime, Atlantic Canada's 3 research universities may also find it difficult to compete

-this is so because Dal/Memorial & UNB are all comparatively small in relation to Central Canadian & Western Canada's bigger institutions

-the most dramatic evidence of the impact of size shows up in recent years, our share of national granting agencies support has fallen steadily.

-so, if the rules are not somewhat sensitive to regional realities & if they rely exclusively on the criteria & procedures of the national granting councils, at the end of the day, Atlantic Canadian universities may get relatively little of these infrastructure funds-this will obviously make it even harder for us to compete in the future for such grants.

-another problem with the rules of the game we may face relates to the need for us to put up matching funds to secure grants from the foundation for Innovation-in principle, this is a reasonable public policy approach, but consider the situation we face in our region.

-we have a highly restricted industrial base that does comparatively little R & D work-so our capacity to secure matching funds through partnerships with private sector is severely constrained.

-secondly, because of the comparatively weak fiscal base of our provincial governments, we get relatively little direct research support from the province-at Dalhousie, for example, we get more research funds from the US government than we do from the NS government. - This compares poorly to the considerable research funding provided by the wealthier provinces in Central & Western Canada.

-so, if the rules for the source of matching funding are highly restrictive, we will have trouble raising matching funds from private sector & provincial government sources.

-please understand, I am not arguing we shouldn't be required to provide matching funds-however, I hope you will press your federal government colleagues to ensure that we be allowed to draw those matches from any & all funds available to us-new money, old money, borrowed money, private or public shouldn't matter as long as we can put our share on the table.

-in summary then, I hope you will work to ensure a measure of regional sensitivity in the new infrastructure program & broad rules that allow flexibility about the sources of funding we put up to provide our share to match federal grants.

-finally, let me close by stressing how important our success in this competition will be to our region

-I think we probably all agree that in the next decade our major challenge in Atlantic Canada is to grow the region's economy in a way that helps us escape our twin dependence on traditional resource industries & government support programs.

-innovation will be crucial to that project & Atlantic Canada's universities play a key role in fostering a positive climate for innovation-whether its spinning out our research efforts into private sector partnership or educating & training the innovators & skilled employees we will need in the future, our region's universities, big & small, play a major role in our development.

-if we fare well in the next round of competition for federal infrastructure money, we will have the kind of institutions we will need to do our job in the years ahead-if we do badly because the rules of the game work against us, our capacity to contribute to innovation & development will be extremely limited.

-this budget has been one of the best for Canada's universities in recent years - I hope you will work with us to make sure that it is also a plus for Atlantic Canada's universities.