

## **Money for bricks, but not talent**

### **University researchers say there isn't enough new funding to close the gap with American universities**

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TORONTO, OTTAWA -- Ottawa is giving Canadian campuses billions for brick-and-mortar projects, but yesterday's budget offered few assurances to universities that they will have the money needed to fill those refurbished labs and lecture halls with top talent.

At a time when U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged to "restore science to its rightful place" with billions in new investments, leaders in the Canadian research community were left scratching their heads over Stephen Harper's response to what many fear will become a widening funding gap.

The headline numbers offered yesterday drew praise from university leaders. There is \$2-billion for colleges and universities to fix their aging buildings, \$87.5-million for new graduate scholarships and \$750-million for the Canada Foundation for Innovation, which funds research infrastructure.

"This is a major investment and it is enormously welcome," McGill principal Heather Munroe-Blum said.

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The new money for CFI is a sign the government recognizes that "brain power is the best investment," University of Alberta president Indira Samarasekera said.

There was also \$50-million for the Institute of Quantum Computing at the University of Waterloo, money that will be matched by a donation from Research In Motion founder Michael Lazaridis, and used along with provincial funding for a building and to recruit leading researchers.

But more than 250 pages back in the budget are figures that point to cuts to the three federal granting councils, the bodies that hand out the money to support continuing research. Over three years, the base budgets of the three agencies will be reduced by \$87.2-million; the government says this money will be directed to other spending programs in higher education.

"The research grants look very problematic," said Tom Traves, president of Dalhousie University and chairman of the university's national association. "This definitely will not close the gap," he said when asked whether the budget will allow him to compete for talent with the promises of the new U.S. administration.

"I'm mystified at any move to cut operating support at the very time they are sending such a powerful signal on their priorities by investing in infrastructure and scholarships," Ms. Munroe-Blum of McGill said.

Mr. Traves characterized yesterday's budget as a "mixed blessing," with pledges of money for buildings that hinge on schools finding matching funds. The new graduate scholarships are for three years only, in keeping with the short-term-stimulus focus of the budget. "There are a lot of unknowns. You can't go to the bank on any of this stuff," he said.

James Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, said the budget fails to provide the clear signal academics were looking for that the government is serious about supporting higher education. "There is not a dime of new money in this budget for the core operating expenses of the postsecondary sector," he said. "Given the U.S. Congress is talking about \$12-billion in research, I think it is much more likely that Canada is going to lose some of its top scientists in this environment."

Mr. Traves cautioned that so far the feared "Obama gap" in research support is all based on promises by an administration that is facing massive debt. "Let's wait and see what happens," he said.

At the University of Waterloo, president David Johnston said there is no question the new federal money and the matching donation will allow the Institute for Quantum Computing to compete at the highest international level. "This puts us in a position to be the strongest in the world in this new area of science," he said.

The institute hopes to double in size to 200 researchers in the next five to seven years.

Yesterday's budget also included an increase in funding to the federal Arctic research program by \$85-million, in large part to maintain or upgrade current facilities in the North. Regarding the federal laboratories spread out across the country, Ottawa will spend \$250-million to modernize facilities in key areas such as health and food safety. However, the money could also be used to facilitate the transfer of federal labs into the hands of universities or businesses.

The government wants to help small- and medium-sized companies to hire 1,000 new postsecondary graduates, including interns.

Finally, the Canada Space Agency is receiving \$110-million over three years to participate in the development of space robotic vehicles, such as the Mars Lander.

There is little question that the brain drain of the Bush era was Canada's gain: The number of American educators who received permits to work here grew by 15 per cent between 2002 and 2007, according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. That figure includes a 27-per-cent jump in the number of university professors and assistants who moved north during the same period.

With a new U.S. administration in place and a climate of optimism and change, many expect that trend will come to an end.