

Notes for a presentation to the House of Commons Finance Committee

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Bonjour. Je vous remercie de m'offrir l'occasion de vous adresser la parole, aujourd'hui.

I've just come from our *Big Thinking* lecture on the Hill where York University's Philip Kelly spoke about the educational and employment outcomes of the children of immigrants. He's spending the rest of today meeting with senior civil servants and MPs who are taking advantage of his time in Ottawa.

This is par for the course for lecturers of *Big Thinking*, our long-standing program that connects the policy-makers and users of research with experts in our disciplines.

Next month we're bringing in University of Calgary tax and economic expert Jack Mintz, who advised us on our submission to the Jenkins panel. With Monday's release of the report, Jack's perspectives on where Canada stands in the global economy will be timely.

While their expertise varies, these people have much in common. They're addressing urgent matters on the minds of leaders, policy-makers and Canadians.

Today, with the support of the granting agencies, notably the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and other funding mechanisms, our students and researchers are tackling everything from cybercrime to aging, from Aboriginal education to digital media.

To be sure, some of the impacts of this work are not always easily measured. But, that doesn't mean the impacts aren't real. Our students and researchers are in communities across the country making tangible contributions every day. For example:

- University of Northern British Columbia researchers developed innovative commercial solutions to help sustain the \$13 billion forestry sector after pine beetle infestation devastated 80% of merchantable lumber.
- The Ottawa Neighbourhood Study is one of only 11 projects worldwide to receive an IBM Centennial Grant, dedicated to improving health and social service delivery to Ottawa residents and neighbourhoods.

- Des chercheurs de l'Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières ont développé des outils permettant d'accroître la souplesse, la vitesse de réaction et la capacité d'innovation et ces outils sont présentement utilisés dans plus de 600 PME au Canada.

It's no wonder Google recently announced plans to hire around 5,000 employees from the liberal arts. This is the logical extension of the advice delivered by Don Tapscott and dozens of other Canadian high-tech CEOs ten years ago, and I'm quoting: "To prosper we need creative thinkers at all levels of the enterprise who are comfortable dealing with decisions in the bigger context. They must be able to communicate—to reason, create, write and speak—for shared purposes."

Contrary to what some would have you believe, this need still persists. Workers who understand how people in different contexts think and behave are invaluable to productivity and prosperity. This will be even more essential as Canada moves forward into the knowledge-centred and digital economy.

By more effectively harnessing and pairing diverse types of knowledge and by stimulating more research of all kinds we believe Canada can achieve greater success by developing its comparative advantage: a knowledgeable, nimble and globally-connected citizenry and workforce. With Budget 2011, we welcomed the increased funding for the granting agencies—particularly for SSHRC, and the explicit acknowledgement of the important role for the humanities and social sciences in our society.

Afin de tirer parti de cette situation, nous recommandons au comité de prendre en considération les trois éléments suivants pour le budget de 2012 : un, le maintien des investissements dans les agences subventionnaires fédérales et le FCI; deux, un plus grand soutien à la collaboration intersectorielle; trois, plus de possibilités pour les étudiants d'appliquer leurs talents à une vaste gamme d'entreprises dont les besoins de recherche sont réels et souvent insatisfaits.

Michael Allen, president and CEO of United Way Ottawa said it best when the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study received IBM support, “By bringing these partners together from academia, social services, government and business, we are leveraging each sector’s expertise to ensure we have the greatest impact and enable positive change.”

Ladies and gentlemen, as this committee carefully grapples with how to nurture an innovation system and generate better results in a financially constrained climate, it’s a responsible decision to protect and sustain what we’ve built. Let’s be strategic, let’s be holistic, and let’s work together to bolster the whole. To fail to do so would jeopardize the momentum Canada has enviably generated in this innovation race.

Thank you.