

Remarks concerning the Impact of the Pandemic
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)
Tuesday, June 2, 2020
3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Opening Statement
Dr Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor, Western University

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to comment on the effects of the pandemic at Western University and across our sector.

I want to thank the Government of Canada for its leadership in responding to the pandemic / and thank my community for its extraordinary efforts.

The substantial allocation made in support of post-secondary students is impressive on a world scale. And the new research allocations are helping Canadian researchers contribute to the global efforts.

At Western, that support has been augmented by our own \$2.6-million *Student Relief Fund*, donated in part by our alumni, faculty and staff. We have assisted more than 3,400 Western students in immediate need—a surprising number.

In early March, the *Canadian Institutes of Health Research* invested new funds to fast-track a national response to COVID-19 — and **two** of these pan-Canadian research teams are led by Western professors.

In late March, \$1 million in federal funding was awarded to vaccine researchers at Western's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, where our new Level III biohazards laboratory is being put to very good purpose.

And in April, the Government launched *CanCOVID*, a network of health-care professionals, university researchers and policy-makers united against COVID-19. Western faculty members play a leading role there.

Western added \$1 million to support COVID-19 related interdisciplinary projects working on rapid response initiatives.

Amidst the research projects, the Western community has also donated a significant amount of PPE, offered free accommodation to front-line health care workers, designed and manufactured thousands of face shields for hospital staff, and more.

Looking ahead to September and beyond, we are working hard to ensure our students are able to access the high-quality learning environment and transformative student experience they and their families expect of us.

To achieve these goals, we are taking a number of steps.

These include:

- hiring a dozen new PhD-level instructional designers;
- hiring 250 advanced Western students to help portage face-to-face courses into virtual experiences;
- creating free online summer modules for first-year students to help them catch up academically and to begin forming the social networks we know are critical to their academic success;
- and many other measures to support our learning environment.

We have also increased our undergraduate bursaries and scholarship funds by 44%, to \$44M. Graduate student support has risen to about \$60M for next year.

I would say we have not been particularly surprised by the additional costs to the university's operating budget.

But these additional costs are already in the multiple tens of millions of dollars.

Some of these new expenses are obvious—in moving thousands of courses online, for example.

But other expenses are less obvious—such as the loss of meaningful amounts of ancillary revenue, and the anticipated decline in private-sector research partnerships, as the private sector itself / contracts.

Of course the most important costs—the human costs—for all of us, cannot be calculated directly.

For this Fall term, assuming that public health regulations make it possible, we intend to operate in-person academic experiences of some sort for between 25 and 30% of our courses; the rest will be delivered online. Assuming we have government approval, our campus will be open.

So far enrollments are holding strong, but with the effects of the pandemic still unfolding, the impact on enrollment

will not be known until the Fall. This hangs over all Canadian universities.

There is even more uncertainty around international enrollment. Just under 15% of Western students come from abroad.

However, in a post-pandemic world with all of the new geopolitics, it's plausible to imagine Canada as a beacon of hope and opportunity for international talent.

As we emerge from the pandemic, Western looks forward to responding to other global challenges affecting Canadians—climate change comes to mind.

Western would strongly support a national infrastructure program addressing key global challenges, knowing that such investments would help stimulate the economy in southwestern Ontario.

The SIF program was a great success at Western. We saw two nationally recognized buildings, which elevated our research and innovation.

So we greatly appreciate the substantial investments made by the Government of Canada.

But we also recognize that our efforts / to advance the academic missions of Canada's great universities / will have substantial additional costs, too.

Our missions are robust, and fundamental to the well-being of the students and communities we serve.

Our missions are vital to the health and future of Canada itself.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear.