

ONTARIO 360'S SOCIAL POLICY AND OPPORTUNITY ROUNDTABLE WITH JENNIFER ROBSON: IMPROVING ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Opening Remarks by Meric Gertler, President of the University of Toronto

Thursday, April 26, 2018

Thank you, Peter, for that kind introduction. Thanks also to Rudyard Griffiths for inviting me to join today's discussion. Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the University of Toronto.

I know we are all looking forward to Professor Robson's presentation and the conversation to follow. The topic is of particular interest to those of us directly involved in the sector. It is also of great importance to our broader society.

As Canadians, we justly celebrate our standing among the world's most educated countries. At the same time, we have a shared obligation to ensure equity in access to higher education, so that the opportunities it makes possible are widely shared. Nowhere is this responsibility more evident than in a place like Toronto, where more than half of the population has come here from around the world in search of opportunity.

For its part, U of T is strongly committed to this objective – and we too are justly proud of our record of leadership in ensuring access for all qualified students, regardless of their personal financial means. Thanks to our 20-year-old access guarantee, more than half of our domestic undergraduates receive needs-based financial aid, which reduces the cost of their education significantly. Our current Boundless Campaign, and its predecessors, have succeeded in raising an endowment for student aid that now exceeds \$1B.

In addition, every year, hundreds of our students work in the city's low-income neighbourhoods, tutoring and mentoring high-school students and helping them to raise their educational aspirations. But we remain acutely aware that there is still much more to be done, as Professor Robson argues so compellingly in her report.

Higher education remains one of the most important determinants of our prosperity, and one of the most potent drivers of social mobility. Because of its

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power to transform the lives of individuals and communities, equity in access to higher education must be a priority for all of us – in academia, business, civil society, public service, and across the political spectrum.

On that note, I am delighted to have this opportunity to thank all those involved in the Ontario 360 initiative, led by U of T's School of Public Policy and Governance. In particular I would like to thank the expert contributors, the Advisory Board members, and of course the Project Principals, Sean Speer, Peter Loewen, and Rudyard Griffiths.

SPPG is doing brilliant work in preparing the next generation of policy experts, in the Ontario Public Service and well beyond. It provides a forum for leading researchers, professionals, and stakeholders, comprising an essential hub for policy discourse.

It will continue to do so, as it soon becomes an integral part of the newly created Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. It will continue to exemplify U of T's deep commitment to collaborating with partners in our community, to address society's most important challenges, in pursuit of the common good.

This brings me back to the project that has brought us here today. Ontario 360 is an *extremely timely* initiative – designed to inform policy discussion and development in the crucial periods before and after the upcoming provincial election campaign. But the project is timely on another level as well. Despite our many advantages, we in Ontario face a daunting array of long-term challenges, and the need for evidence-based policymaking to chart the way forward has never been greater.

Ontario 360 proposes to help fill the resulting 'gap in our democratic infrastructure', as Peter and Sean put it in their recent essay. At the same time, the initiative appeals to a higher, hopeful sense that, on so many key issues, a well-informed consensus on the way forward really *is* achievable.

On behalf of the University of Toronto, I would like to thank all of you for your contributions to this creative and promising new venture, and I wish you every success as it unfolds.