

Nova Scotia youth discuss alternatives to warships

Grade 11 student says Canada should invest in food security and small-scale agriculture

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[Tamara Lorincz protests the Irving Shipbuilding Contract every Wednesday.](#) (Photo: Jon Grant)

A province wide high school essay contest has encouraged young people to express their opinions about how they think the federal and provincial governments could better spend \$25B allotted to building warships in Halifax, NS.

Nearly a dozen essays featuring a variety of alternative spending strategies from food security to a commitment to green energy prove that young people in Nova Scotia are thinking critically about the long term sustainability of the Nova Scotia economy.

The contest was sponsored by the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group and organized and judged by Tamara Lorincz. For the past eight months, Lorincz has been protesting the warships each Wednesday outside the Irving Shipyards on Barrington Street.

"I wanted to reach out to young people in the province. I want Nova Scotians of all ages to think critically about the federal government spending our tax dollars, \$25B, instead of being invested in other ways," says Lorincz.

"With young people in particular I was very concerned that young Canadians have difficulty in affording post-secondary education. I don't believe the federal government is investing enough in children and youth and I think their future is at risk with this warship contract" she added.

In February 2012, the provincial government published their education strategy, Kids and Learning First, which aims to create introductory trades courses. The report notes that "the course will expose students to trades including boat builder, iron worker, machinist, marine fitter, metal fabricator, sheet metal worker, and welder" — all of which are trades required to build warships.

Considering the time it will take to develop the curriculum, the time it will take for students to graduate with these skills, and the fact that the Irving shipbuilding contract is a 20-year contract with no guarantee of renewal, this report appears to be a short-sighted attempt to involve NS youth in a temporary economic venture.

Contest winner Rebecca MacNeil, a grade 11 student at the Rankin School of the Narrows, argued that Canada needs to further invest in food security and small-scale agriculture.

"There are people that are going hungry that are not able to afford good nutritious food and feeding people is more important than the Canadian navy having new warships. Canadians need access to nutritious food, we need to be investing in our farming, we need to be investing in organic agriculture, and food security measures" says Lorincz on why MacNeil's essay won.

When asked why young people should be involved in the direction of Canada's future, MacNeil wrote: "in the future, students will be the next generation running the country and many of the new policies and laws of Canada will stem from the youth of today. It is important that students are encouraged to voice their opinions and ready themselves as the future leaders of this country."

While MacNeil has no plans to enter a trade upon graduation, she is fully aware of the potential effects the shipbuilding contract would have on her hometown of Benacadie, NS.

"Cape Bretoners [may] have to live, move, or commute to Halifax to ensure employment thus causing a decline in population and uprooting families, a scenario that already exists today in regard to jobs in western Canada" says MacNeil.

Lorincz thinks government spending should reflect the priorities of its constituents.

"The national shipbuilding procurement strategy does not reflect the priorities of Canadians. Time and time again polls show that the top priorities for Canadians are in health, education, and the environment. It doesn't reflect the priorities of Canadians. Canadians and the Canadian parliament were not consulted on this" she says.

The essay contest asked young people to think about complex issues such as long-term sustainability and a peaceful way forward.

In her daily life, MacNeil says she promotes peace "by being a caring and responsible citizen, volunteering in my community, and being of service to others. This involves giving a voice to invisible minorities, helping the needs of the poor, and fund raising for various groups that require financial assistance."