

## **King's student union out to keep Hamm off board of governors**

By RICK CONRAD Education Reporter

He's one of its best-known former students. He has donated money to his former school and even received the distinguished alumnus award earlier this year for his contributions as a family doctor and a politician.

But some students at the University of King's College don't want former premier John Hamm on the school's board of governors.

Mr. Hamm, who graduated from King's in 1958 with a B.Sc., is being considered for one of the 28 seats on the board of the Halifax university.

Its student union launched a campaign and petition Thursday to keep him away. Student union representatives began posting notices around campus Thursday titled John Hamm — No Friend of Students, asking students "to ensure that John Hamm does not do any more damage to King's than he already has."

They collected 170 signatures in a few hours and hope to get most of the school's 1,100 students to sign. They also plan to lobby each member of the board before a Sept. 28 meeting at which members will vote on Mr. Hamm's nomination.

"If John Hamm wanted to help universities like King's College, he should have done so when he was premier," Chris Parsons, the King's student union's external vice-president, said in an interview Thursday.

"Instead, during the first six years that he was premier, he cut \$11 million from the operating budgets (of universities). While he was premier, tuition fees at King's College went up 74 per cent. While he was premier, he created a situation where education became less and less accessible for needy students, and we think that if he wanted to

help the college, he had a great opportunity to do so during the seven years that he was premier of Nova Scotia, and he chose not to."

Mr. Hamm upset many students in April by suggesting, when he was no longer premier but still MLA for Pictou Centre, that students who leave the province after they graduate should repay some of the cost of their education.

His government was also criticized in December 2004 for excluding students from consultations on a plan to limit tuition fee increases.

"His past track record shows that he doesn't really have an interest in keeping education accessible to all people, regardless of socio-economic circumstances," Mr. Parsons said.

"And we think that a key part of the board of governors, in order to run a successful university, is to keep the students' input in mind because they're the ones that attend the university and that the university's serving."

Mr. Hamm could not be reached for comment Thursday. A King's spokeswoman said the university didn't want to comment yet because it hasn't had a chance to discuss the issue with the board.

"We don't really know what the implications are going to be," Kara Holm said in an interview.

"We want to talk to the chair of the board, which we haven't really had an opportunity to do — and talk to Dr. Hamm, obviously — but we don't have any comment right now."

Ben Caplan, a second-year King's student in early modern studies, contemporary studies, history and Spanish, said he supports the student union's stand and has signed the petition.

He said it "makes me feel sick" to think that Mr. Hamm could join the board.

"Looking at the figures for tuition in 1999 and tuition now, my summer job that I toiled at for 65 hours a week would have paid for tuition easily, and I would have been comfortable with my rent and I wouldn't have had to take out loans," Mr. Caplan said in an interview on the front steps of the King's arts and administration building.

The average undergraduate tuition in Nova Scotia is \$6,571, the highest in the country. In the 1999-2000 school year, the average undergraduate tuition was \$4,113, also then the highest, according to Statistics Canada.

If he is elected to the board, Mr. Hamm would have a four-year term and a vote on many issues affecting students.

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