

Mark Norris

BA in political science (St Francis Xavier)

MLA (2001-2004)
Minister of Economic Development

Mark Norris wasn't a member of the Legislature when the government passed Bill 40, but he says that the bill should be repealed to give students better assurances about tuition.

"I would like to enshrine tuition back into legislation. I think it's important that government officials have a say in what's going on," Norris says.

Still, Norris believes that the former tuition policy, which allowed postsecondary institutions to increase tuition by up to 30 per cent of their operating budget, was not effective, and ten to 15 per cent would be a better goal.

"A well-educated work force is obviously more healthy, more productive," Norris says. "I think when we allowed the universities and colleges to go to 30 per cent—and they all did—that's really what hammered the affordability of postsecondary education."

He explains that the recent debate between the equal distribution of new student spaces between Edmonton and Calgary is a moot point.

"I don't think they ever will be provided equally. I think that was a red herring from the get-go," he says.

Norris points to the fact that the University of Alberta has historically been larger, providing a greater diversity of programs than the University of Calgary, and went on to say that institutions in the province should be given spaces based on demand rather than focusing on a balanced distribution.

"It's not logical for a government to say one size fits all," Norris

says.

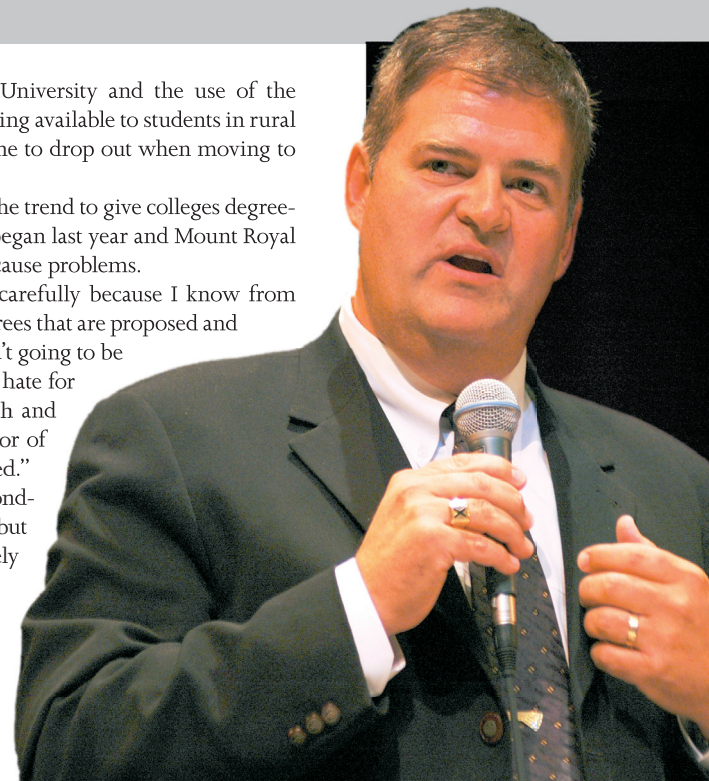
Norris suggests that Athabasca University and the use of the SuperNet makes long distance learning available to students in rural communities, which are often prone to drop out when moving to the city to attend university.

However, Norris cautioned that the trend to give colleges degree-granting status—Grant MacEwan began last year and Mount Royal is moving in that direction—may cause problems.

"I think we have to tread very carefully because I know from some research that some of the degrees that are proposed and coming out of Grant MacEwan aren't going to be recognized," Norris says. "I would hate for Alberta students to go down a path and think they're going to get a Bachelor of Arts degree that won't be recognized."

He went on to say that postsecondary education isn't a cost pressure, but an investment that would ultimately benefit all Albertans.

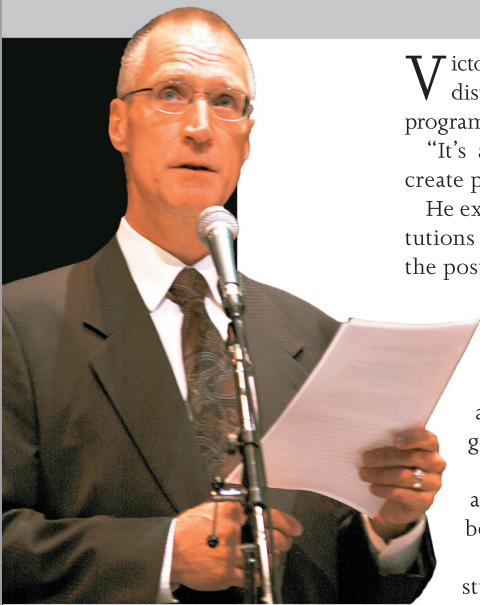
Once we get people understanding that the whole of society benefits by a great, healthy postsecondary education system, I think we're far better off," Norris says.



Victor Doerksen

Certified General Accountant

MLA (1993-Present)
Minister of Innovation and Science



Victor Doerksen, MLA for Red Deer-South, is a supporter of distance education, and hopes to expand upon the existing programs and resources to create more spaces for students.

"It's a way to create spaces without having to necessarily create physical spaces," he says.

He explains that expanding upon partnerships between institutions across the province can give students greater access to the postsecondary system.

The ongoing tuition debate has students demanding more funding from government, but Doerksen is of the mind that students should be contributing about 30 per cent of the cost—a few percentage points above the current state of affairs—leaving the rest to the government and taxpayers.

"I think that it's quite appropriate for students to bear a portion of their education. It's a shared responsibility between students and other taxpayers," Doerksen says.

Doerksen says that the greatest cost burden to rural students in particular isn't tuition costs, but that they

have to leave home and find accommodations in the city.

"The way to address that really is to look at the current limits we put around the student finance or the student loans to make sure we have the appropriate room and board figures there in terms of what the actual cost is when they're making an application," Doerksen notes.

He goes on to say that barriers to the student finance system often affect students from middle-income homes.

"Parents are expected to contribute a certain amount for their kid's education. I think that needs to be reviewed as well because I think for kids from middle-income homes, that's providing a bit of a barrier," Doerksen says.

Doerksen voted in favour of Bill 40 and says that having tuition out of legislation shouldn't be a matter of concern to students.

"I think that through regulation you can actually make it more responsive to the particular needs of the time," Doerksen says. "I would certainly engage student leaders from all the institutions in any changes that would be made to regulation."

Gary McPherson

Honourary Doctor of Laws (U of A)
Order of Canada

Though Gary McPherson has never been an elected member of the Legislature, he served as an appointed member of government as chairman on the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. McPherson, who contracted polio when he was nine years old, is also a presence on the U of A campus, drawing on his life experience to give lectures in a plethora of courses and providing an advisory role in the Faculty of Physical Education & Recreation.

McPherson says that making postsecondary more affordable takes a political commitment.

"Words are one thing, but action is another, and I recognize as well as most that tuition challenges for students and the crippling debt that they come out of university and colleges with is totally unacceptable. You can't get started in life when you're under a mountain of debt," McPherson says.

He suggests creating a personal education savings plan, which would give young people who decided to work instead of pursuing postsecondary studies the incentive to return to school.

McPherson says that by using technology, the government is reaching students across the province, with projects like the Lois Hole digital library and the SuperNet.

"I think technology is significant," McPherson says, adding that the government should invest more money into new technologies.

He goes on to say that improving student spaces in urban centres comes with the additional challenge that it draws students away from their communities, which increases their cost of living.

"Just because you have more physical space doesn't necessarily make it that much better because students still have to be there and that costs money to be there," he says.

Again, McPherson points to technology as a means to improve the delivery of education.

"We have to look at every way that we can open up more spaces, and distance [education] does allow us to reach more people. It also allows you to take quality faculty and bring it to the students, as opposed to any faculty member," McPherson says. "We have to be very creative about how we do that. People's time is very precious [and] we have to allow education to be flexible in real time so that we can allow people to other things as well."

