

Clash of the Titans

AS PREMIER RALPH KLEIN is set to step down by the end of the year, the race to replace the leader of the Progressive Conservatives is in full swing. Eight candidates are vying for the position, travelling to each corner of the province in an effort to garner support for the 25 November vote. From the campaign trail, the candidates took the time to tell the *Gateway* about their plans for postsecondary education.

Feature by CHLOÉ FEDIO with photos by MATT FREHNER

Dave Hancock

Law degree (U of A)

MLA (1997-Present)
Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Minister of Advanced Education

DAVE HANCOCK resigned from his post as minister of advanced education in April, leaving the announcement of a new tuition policy up in the air to pursue leadership of the Alberta PCs. And though the new policy was announced last week, the Edmonton-Whitemud MLA has a different vision than the current ministry to create a more affordable postsecondary system.

“What I’ve proposed is that we actually pay the first year of tuition for all students, provided they complete their course,” Hancock says.

Not only will this funding help bridge the funding gap for students, but Hancock says it will also encourage transition from high school to postsecondary.

“You still need to have the student finance system in place to assist people to finance the process, but if they know that upon completion they get, in essence, the complete onus of their first year of tuition, that’s a major incentive,” Hancock says.

Hancock also suggested that Alberta postsecondary graduates who work in the province for three years after finishing their program should receive a tax credit equivalent to 20 per cent of the cost of their education, to be met over the following five years. To encourage rural students, he suggested the same tax credit, to be met over the course of three years for those living and working outside the Edmonton and Calgary areas.

“Education is the best investment an individual can make,” Hancock says. “So you should be able to write off the defined cost of your

education.”

He says that the passing of Bill 40 in the spring, which took tuition out of legislation and put it into regulation, wasn’t necessary and that it “diverted the whole process by raising a trust issue instead of getting people working together, resolving the real issue.”

“It was a government bill and I placed my arguments in caucus,” Hancock says. “I don’t think I was there to vote on that bill—probably purposely.”

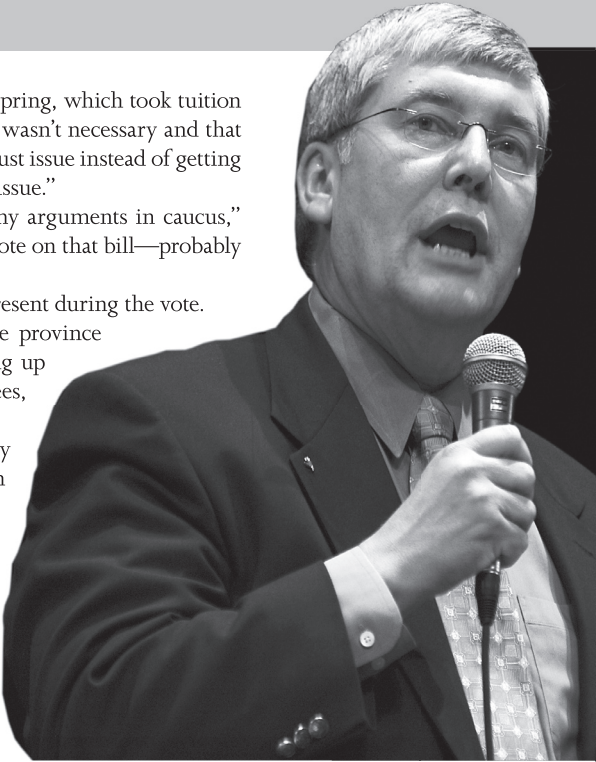
Legislature records show that he wasn’t present during the vote.

Hancock says that the universities in the province have been doing a “great job” of partnering up with colleges in rural areas to offer degrees, and that this trend needs to continue.

“What we know is that the postsecondary education level is lower in rural Alberta than it is in urban Alberta—and it’s way too low in all of Alberta—so we need to get those opportunities out there.”

The government has promised to create 60 000 new student spaces by 2020, and Hancock intends to follow through on that promise.

“The only question in my mind is if that’s going far enough fast enough.”



Jim Dinning

Bachelor of Commerce (Queen’s)
MA in Public Administration (Queen’s)

MLA (1986-97)
Minister of Community and Occupational Health
Minister of Education
Provincial Treasurer

JIM DINNING doesn’t currently hold a seat in the Legislature but he’s one of the leading candidates for the PC leadership race with over 30 Tory MLAs in his camp, including Minister of Advanced Education Denis Herard. He says the new tuition policy announced last Friday—which will see the 2004/05 tuition levels that students pay now increase by CPI starting in 2007—is moving down the right path.

“I think that’s a fair share,” Dinning says. “My sense is that the actual cost of a university or college education is going up in excess of CPI, so over time the student’s actual percentage contribution will at worst stay flat, and at best begin to drop.”

Despite the passing of Bill 40 in April, Dinning is confident that any subsequent changes to the new policy will take student input into consideration.

“You’ve got a minister of advanced education who has made a solemn promise, and I would back up that promise—that he would consult with and reach out far and wide to get the most amount of input in the tuition policy,” Dinning says. “Denis Herard has done exactly that [so far]. He is a man of his word and I trust him.”

Dinning says that the policy has modernized the student finance system, “recognizing real costs, not nostalgic, ten-years-ago costs” of an education that extend beyond tuition to include the day-to-day living costs, such as books, transportation and housing.

Dinning is also supporting Herard’s intention to have Alberta step down from the Canadian Student Loan Program, which currently administers 60 per cent of loans, so that the province can have full control of the program—something he says will give the government greater flexibility in the remittance of loans.

He also believes that additional student spaces need to be distributed beyond Edmonton and Calgary to serve rural students in the province’s colleges, preventing the additional cost of having the students leave their communities for Alberta’s urban centres.

“I’m not an expert in this area, so I’m not going to say X per cent to Edmonton, Y per cent to Calgary and Z per cent elsewhere. There are smart people in the province who have got to sit down and work together to decide where those investments need to be made.”

