



MATT FREHNER

CROSSING HIS T'S AND DOTTING HIS I'S Doug Horner is enjoying settling in to his new role as cabinet minister.

Horner a self-dubbed student as new postsecondary minister

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Now that the dust has settled on the Progressive Conservative leadership race, which saw Ralph Klein hand the reigns over to Ed Stelmach, the Alberta government is beginning to hone in on its objectives for the year to come. For Doug Horner, MLA for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, this means saying goodbye to his role as minister of agriculture, food and rural development, and taking on the new Department of Advanced Education and Technology.

Horner explained that the fusion of advanced education with innovation and technology is a good fit, as post-secondary institutions are home to much of the research that goes on in the province. And though he's new in the post, appointed on 15 December, Horner said he's no stranger to either of the two departments that make his new portfolio.

"Research and development, and postsecondary education in the agricultural field is critical to the success of the agricultural industry in the future—and that's true of just about all the industry that we have and the new ones to come," Horner said, adding that in today's knowledge-based society, education is "a critical factor for Alberta's growth."

Over the past twelve months, the advanced education portfolio has been led under three different ministers. Dave Hancock resigned from his post before the conclusion of the postsecondary review he initiated to run for party leadership, and the portfolio was appointed to Denis Herard, who announced a new tuition policy for the province in November.

Raj Pannu, NPD critic for advanced education and technology, said that the changes in the government left unanswered questions about whether Klein's promise that Alberta would have the most affordable tuition in the country would be fulfilled. He said that when Herard took over, the ministry dragged its heels before finally coming up with the long-anticipated policy.

"I, first of all, didn't find minister Herard cooperative with us on that matter. He took much too long a time to come up with some sort of a position, and that was a

partial sort of announcement," the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona said, adding that the policy was a disappointment.

Stelmach is meeting with his caucus next week to set priorities for the government, however he has already placed the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology as the second-highest senior Cabinet position behind the President of the Treasury Board. Horner explained that the government is currently planning the budget, but wouldn't comment any further.

"I can't tell you what's going to be in the budget, because then they'd throw me in jail," he said.

Horner hinted that future announcements from the ministry would be linked to affordability of a postsecondary education, but continued to be tight-lipped on the subject.

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**DOUG HORNER,
MINISTER OF ADVANCED
EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY**

"Affordability is a fuzzy kind of thing in a lot of ways because what do you include in affordability?" he asked, pointing to the varying methods of calculating affordability in different areas. "I'm a learner right now; I'm a student myself."

Dave Cournoyer, Students' Union Vice-President (External), said that the change in government leadership is an opportunity for the ministry to make some positive changes for post-secondary.

"Our positions haven't changed; we're still advocating for accessible, affordable and quality education for students. We will be meeting with the Minister, but we're waiting to see what type of direction the Minister and the new Premier would like to take with postsecondary education. I'm optimistic," Cournoyer said.

In May, the government passed Bill 40, which amended the Postsecondary Learning Act, taking

tuition out of legislation. Cournoyer explained that without legislation, changes can be made to the tuition policy in closed-door Cabinet meetings, which is a source of concern for students as debate is limited.

"We will make sure the Minister hears our concerns about the tuition policy being re-legislated back into the Postsecondary Learning Act so that further changes can be made in the Legislature and undergo public scrutiny," he said.

However, Horner said he doesn't anticipate the putting the tuition policy back into legislation.

"I think in some ways you want flexibility to be able to deal with issues as they arise as it relates to tuition, and legislation is a slower process than that," Horner said.

Maurice Tougas, the new Liberal critic for advanced education and technology, replaced his colleague Dave Taylor in the shadow Cabinet this week, as Stelmach's restructuring of Cabinet from 24 ministers to 18 left his party in need of similar reorganization.

"I found Klein—there was a real arrogance to him especially in the Legislature itself and I thought that rubbed off on a lot of his ministers, so we'll see if Ed Stelmach's the same kind of person or not," Tougas said. "I don't think so; I think it might be a little bit more civil in the Legislature, but maybe that's just wishful thinking on my part."

Horner explained that though the premier has changed, the government's goals haven't been drastically altered.

"Because we're blending two departments together, our first priority is to ensure that we have a strong foundation from which to grow and build the initiative that in many cases have already been started," Horner said.

Though Cournoyer conceded that the merger of two portfolios was positive, he was concerned that the focus on research at institutions in the province would overshadow instruction.

"It's critical that the provincial government make sure that there's a balance at our universities between it as teaching institution for undergraduates and a research institution as well," Cournoyer said.

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