

Minister discusses issues...

by John Watson

Dave Russell spoke with the Gateway soon after he was appointed to the provincial advanced education portfolio.

He discussed a number of issues that are of concern to students. One of the most controversial topics was remission rates of student loans.

The remission rate is the percentage of a student loan the provincial government agrees to consider a grant.

"I'm open minded about the thing, and I'm ready to sit down and talk about it," Russell said.

Our Students' Union, along with student unions from the Universities of Calgary, Lethbridge and Athabasca, have talked with the minister about remission rates.

University students under the current system fare more poorly than college and technical institute students do.

Students from college and technical institutes currently receive a flat 45 per cent remission on any loans.

University students, on the other hand, get 50 per cent in their first year, 40 per cent in their second and 25 per cent in all subsequent years.

The student unions proposed to Russell a flat 40 per cent rate for all students (university and college) independent of the year of study.

"I can't say at the present time," said Russell, when asked which remission system he thought was best. "It involves a lot of money, you know, so we might as well get our money's worth and please as many

students as we can."

In addition to remission, Russell is busy talking about a number of other important issues as well.

The Next Decade and Beyond, the university president's planning and priorities committee report should be the springboard for a lot of that discussion.

The report contains a number of controversial suggestions for changes at the university. Some of these include: emphasis on computer literacy and training; increasing second language requirements; changing from the semester system to trimester.

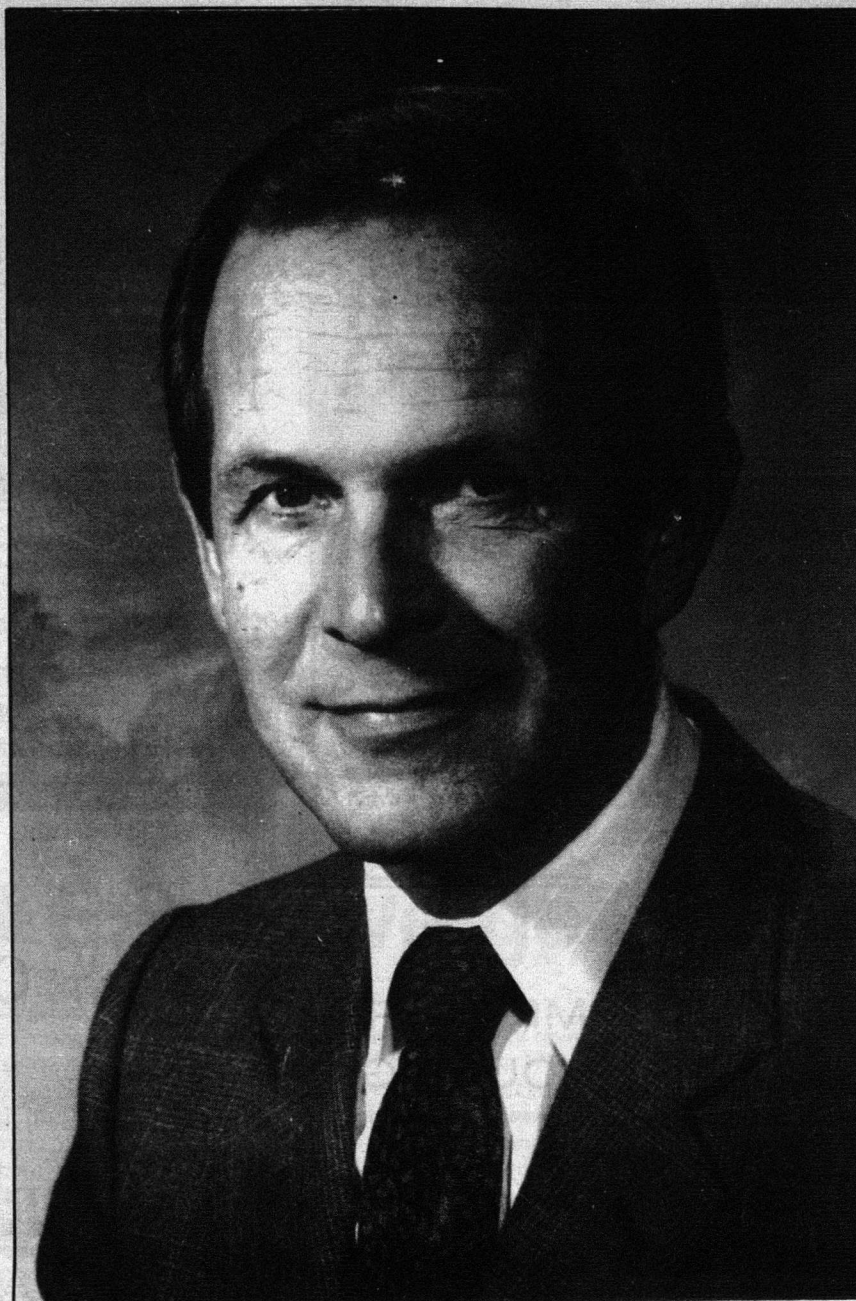
"I regard it (the report) as an important discussion paper, and that is what we will do with it," Russell said. After a little more than two months in office Russell had apparently not studied the report at length.

The Students' Union ran two advertisements in both Edmonton daily newspapers in June. The ads were prompted by the Gainers strike and subsequent court injunctions. The ads raised questions about civil rights in Alberta.

Russell, unfortunately, did not see either ad, "I didn't see them, but I saw the news reports about them."

His only comments were that "students should decide if they want their SU spending their money that way."

Did Russell have an opinion on the content of the ads? "No, I haven't," he said, "if the SU wants to spend its money that way, that is its business."



Advanced education minister Dave Russell.

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