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New Democrats on Education

interview by Ken Bosman

Gerry Gibeault, the Advanced Education critic for the Alberta New Democrats is featured in a wide range discussion.

This concludes the Gateway's interview with the three major parties Advanced Education spokespersons.

Gateway: Where does education fit in the New Democrat list of priorities?

Gibeault: Education and Health Care are close, but I guess education would be number one.

"Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge are not the center of the academic universe."

Gateway: Let's start with funding. A one and a half percent increase for universities this year. Is it enough? What would the New Democrats advocate?

Gibeault: That's just not going to cut it. With a three percent cut last year and inflation averaging around four percent, one and a half only means that the cuts won't be as severe as last year.

I think it shows a lack of commitment to education.

I think a four percent increase would barely keep things going.

Gateway: How is the educational quality in Alberta?

Gibeault: It certainly could be described as better than average. I think the province can be commended for developing the infrastructure. A lot of it is very good.

It's something we should all be very proud of, and we should nurture it.

Gateway: Dave Russell (Advanced Education Minister) maintains that on a per student basis, post-secondary education in Alberta is still the best funded in the country. Is he right or is he wrong?

Gibeault: He's right — if you look at the absolute dollar values. But what has to be considered is that Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge are not the center of the academic universe.

We need to have good facilities and attractive compensation packages to attract people — otherwise we can't compete.

If we want a strong, diversified economy we need a good education system.

Gateway: The Advanced Education Endowment and Incentive Fund, which matches private donations to education, has pumped a lot of public and private money into the system. What do the New Democrats feel about private funding?

Gibeault: I guess we have mixed feelings.

On the plus side, we have a lot of graduates, myself included, who would be quite agreeable to assisting their institution — we got a good education.

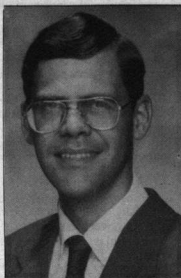
On the other side, some professors are feeling a pressure that they should be finding to support their own activities.

Professors are not well placed to be fundraisers.

When we talk about fundraising, other than individuals, we mean corporate funding. Corporations don't have the same priorities as universities.

We don't want Texaco and the Royal Bank setting the priorities.

Gateway: Would the New Democrats keep the program?



ND Advanced Ed Critic Gerry Gibeault

Gibeault: Overall, I think we'd keep it.

Gateway: The U of A has decided to limit itself to 25,000 students — that obviously has an effect on accessibility. Do you agree with the U of A downsizing — and where do the students go?

Gibeault: As far as it's a response to a funding problem it's unfortunate.

Gateway: Is it funding, or is it an institutional concern?

Gibeault: I think to a degree it's institutional. If you have a psychology class of 500 that's not education — that's processing.

However, when the University says to 400-700 students you don't get in next year that has to be dealt with systematically.

Perhaps there is a greater role for the colleges.

Gateway: You mentioned a systemic approach — the Minister has mentioned "rationalization" — the elimination of some duplicated facilities. Would the New Democrats take the lead in this area?

Gibeault: Two things. Firstly, we will be proposing a complete forum on the post-secondary system — we seem to have more doctors than we need, for example.

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