

Minister of advanced education Horsman addresses students

James Horsman, Progressive Conservative MLA from Medicine Hat, is Alberta's new Minister of Advanced Education. Gateway

associate news editor Lucinda Chodan and CJSR associate news director Nolan Astley interviewed Mr. Horsman in his office Wednesday.

Gateway: What qualifications or previous experience in the field of advanced education do you have that led Premier Lougheed to appoint you Minister of Advanced Education?

Horsman: Well, I guess first of all I've had a couple of degrees with advanced education in my own background, having been a graduate of the University of British Columbia—I have a commerce degree and a law degree, which means I spent several years at UBC. During that time I spent a couple of years on student government as well, which I think is useful.

In addition to that, I was chairman of the Board of Governors at Medicine Hat College prior to the election in 1975. I resigned in mid-term as chairman when I got the nomination as PC candidate in the fall of 1974, so I didn't complete my full term there, but I was for a few years.

During the past four years, I've been a member of the education committee of the government caucus, so during that time, I worked closely both with my predecessor, Dr. Hohol, and with Julian Koziak, Minister of Education.

Gateway: Dr. Hohol, your predecessor, often seemed to find himself in conflict with students at post-secondary institutions. Do you feel this will happen in your term as Minister? Are you planning to meet, for example, with student representatives such as the Federation of Alberta Students (FAS) or Dean instead, president of the U of A's Students' Union?

Horsman: Yes, I've already asked for a meeting with the Federation of Alberta Students. I know generally about the organization and I asked to have a meeting with them as soon as possible. I hope I won't have "conflict"—I guess there's always potential for conflict in any large organization such as the university colleges of any large department of government as well; but I hope that we'll be able to have good communication; I think that's really what it's all about.

I'm presently planning a tour of institutions in the portfolio. The first will start tomorrow morning (Thursday, April 5) at Fairview, going on to Lac La Poudre, SAIT, and the Alberta Vocational Center in Calgary. In each case, I'm meeting with boards and administration, faculty representatives, organizations of non-faculty employees, and with student organizations—not necessarily in that order of importance, because really these institutions exist to serve the students.

Gateway: Do you see yourself making any changes in the handling of your Ministry from your predecessor, Dr. Hohol?

Horsman: Oh, I think everybody has their own style of operating, and I certainly wouldn't want to comment on Dr. Hohol's style. I always got along very well with him. I feel that he was an excellent minister. We had a good relationship.

Of course, I will have my own way of doing things—that's to be expected. I'm not going to outline exactly what I'm going to do in the next four years in this portfolio—I don't know exactly what I'm going to do. I do know I'm going to work hard at it; I'm going to be available, I'm going to meet with organizations and groups interested in education.

Gateway: Getting back to your policies and plans for the Ministry—one of the policies of the government seemed to be extremely alien to members of the university community was the issue of differential fees. Are you planning to change the policy on differential fees?

Horsman: No, I am not. I think that we've introduced a program, and I think that the program should be allowed a chance of working and seeing how it works. I think that it is supported by the people of the province, generally speaking, and I don't intend to change it—I want to give it an opportunity to see how it's working before suggesting any changes, if any.

Gateway: Your predecessor also commissioned the Panham task force report on post-secondary education. What are you planning to do with the findings of the report?

Horsman: Well, I'm going to be reviewing the presentations that have come in to the department. We have up until the end of May, I believe, for presentations and recommendations arising from the report. Following the receipt of all that representation, I will be reviewing it together with department officials, with the caucus committee on education, and with our



whole caucus and cabinet, in order to determine what policies will flow from that report.

I think there are some very, very exciting recommendations in that report, particularly with respect to student finance. I think they really do recommend some significant improvements in that area, and I'd like to look at those first of all. Following from that we can take a look at some of the other recommendations, as well; primarily, I think, we've got to address that issue first because we would like, if we're going to have any new programs in place, they should be in place for the opening of the fall session of your institutions.

Gateway: So then, a review of the student loans program could come over the summer?

Horsman: Yes, that will be a high priority.

Gateway: The government announced yesterday an 8 per cent increase in funding for the operating costs of the university. Last year's increase was 8.25 per cent, and the university's Board of Governors had planned their budget with a similar figure in mind: Why did the government lessen the amount from last year's figures?

Well, it's in keeping with the overall policies of the government with respect to the increases in operating costs of institutions. As you know, enrollments have been relatively stable throughout the system; in fact, some places have shown declines in enrollment; I'm talking of the overall system and not the University of Alberta specifically here.

We felt that across the board that would be an adequate figure to cover the increase in operating costs, primarily salaries associated with institutional operations. We hope the universities and colleges will be able to live within the figures we have suggested we've prepared to recommend to the Assembly.

Gateway: Mr. Lorne Leitch, vp finance of the university, said this morning that the 8.0 figure would not even cover the cost of inflation because the university faces higher inflation in certain areas, such as chemicals and glassware. What is your response to that?

Horsman: Well, those items reflect only a small portion of the university's operating budget. I'm not going to get involved in a public argument with Mr. Leitch at this stage, but we hope that as I pointed out

earlier, the key thing is the cost of salaries at universities, and those range from between 75 and 80% of the total operating costs of institutions. In keeping with wage settlements and the guidelines suggested by the government for public institutions and government services, we feel that those are realistic figures and that we hope they'll be able to live within them.

What I should point out as well—you must keep in mind that one of the main concerns expressed in previous years was the question of increased library costs. In order to deal with that concern in part, there was a major contribution from the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund in a capital nature towards university and colleges libraries throughout the province. I'll be including in my letters to the universities details of those grants.

Gateway: How much will the libraries grant be?

Horsman: I haven't got those figures before me right now, and I do have to advise the university first before I advise the public.

Gateway: Your predecessor said there would be no tuition increases this year for university students. In light of the announcement yesterday, however, some members are rumoured to be talking about tuition increases to make up the shortfall in the budget. What is your stand on this?

Horsman: Well, the question of raising tuition fees has to be a shared responsibility of the boards of governors and the department. In keeping with the policies of my predecessor, the Minister, I would wish to follow his policy in that respect and avoid any increase in fees this year.

Gateway: So as far as you're concerned, there will be no tuition increases this year?

Horsman: Well, if the Board of Governors at the institutions come to the department with a recommendation in that regard, it is something that has to be done in consultation with the department, but I would not be recommending any increase in fees, and certainly would do anything possible to avoid that happening.

Gateway: The Heritage Saving Trust Fund is a major "money pool". Is the Department of Advanced Education planning to use any money from this to fund post-secondary institutions?

Horsman: Well, in the overall scheme of things, the operations of any government department will not be funded from the Heritage Savings Trust Fund. Those funds are primarily set aside for the future and for capital projects. And under the capital projects division of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund at the present time, I've already mentioned the libraries grants.

There are additional grants for elementary and secondary education under the Alberta Heritage Learning Resources Program.

Of course, of particular concern to the Universities of Alberta and Calgary, the Health Sciences Center at the University of Alberta is being funded under the Heritage Savings Trust Fund; also the Cancer Clinic at the Foothills Hospital—I'm not too sure how that ties in to the University of Calgary medical school, but I know those facilities are used by the University of Calgary medical school.

In addition, we have announced the creation of a \$300 million medical research fund, which will be set up under a foundation dedicated to medical research in the province. Of course, much of that will be carried out at the Universities of Calgary and Alberta. I think that will have a major effect on that aspect of universities in the province.

At the present time there are no plans for any further involvement that I'm in a position to discuss.

Gateway: Do you have any message or anything you'd like to make known to the students at the U of A?

Horsman: Yes, I don't have a philosophical statement, but I really think that all universities and colleges in Alberta have an exciting role ahead of all of us as Albertans in developing this province. It's undergone a tremendous change in the last few years, from a primarily agriculturally-based economy to one which is going to be involved a good deal in the petrochemical industry; but will move from that into a diversified economy.

That is exciting for young Albertans and those of you who are at universities today have an opportunity that is really challenging. I hope that you will be joining with all the rest of us in government and in the province to make Alberta even a better place to live, and by doing that, making Canada a better place to live. I, like the Premier and the rest of the cabinet, are Canadians first and Albertans second.