

Title: Wednesday, March 24, 1999 Subcom. A: Advanced Education and Career Development

Date: 99/03/24

8:10 p.m.

[Mr. Severtson in the Chair]

Subcommittee A - Advanced Education and Career Development

Gordon, Judy, Chairman
Severtson, Gary, Deputy Chairman
Bonner, Bill
Boutilier, Guy
Burgener, Jocelyn
Cardinal, Mike
Ducharme, Denis

Dunford, Clint
Friedel, Gary
Hierath, Ron
Jacques, Wayne
Johnson, LeRoy
Lougheed, Rob
Mar, Gary

Marz, Richard
Massey, Don
Ober, Lyle
O'Neill, Mary
Pannu, Raj
Sapers, Howard

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll call the Committee of Supply to order. This is subcommittee A, and tonight we're reviewing Advanced Education and Career Development. We'll start off with the minister, the Hon. Clint Dunford.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here to ask for your support for the ministry's budget for the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Many of you will be familiar with the ministry's specific programs, initiatives, and successes as a result of this morning's discussions at the Public Accounts Committee. Just had to get that in there. Tonight I would like to take a broader approach and look at how we will be preparing the public service and the adult learning system and the Albertans who are a part of it for the challenges of the future.

With me tonight are several people who will be able to provide additional details. I have Jim Dixon, who is the Public Service Commissioner; Lynne Duncan, the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development; Phil Gougeon, our assistant deputy minister of learning and support; Gerry Waisman, executive director, finance and administrative services; and Michele Kirchner, director of strategic planning and research. Did you wave, Michele?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, I just have to inform you that this is Committee of Supply, and staff members can't be at the table at this time. It's different if it's designated supply.

MR. DUNFORD: But I'll be all by myself. Are you telling these nice people that they can't sit at the table? Is that what you're doing?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That's what I'm saying, Mr. Minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. All right.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Unless the committee gives unanimous consent. If we had a motion for unanimous consent, they could stay.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any opposed? Okay. They can stay.

MR. DUNFORD: Isn't that nice. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, Clint. Just make sure it's clear that they can't give answers tonight.

MR. DUNFORD: It was okay to introduce everyone, though, wasn't

it? I didn't mention Steve MacDonald, who is our executive director, or Shelby MacLeod, who is my executive assistant. So is it okay to mention them?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes. It's okay to do introductions.

I also apologize to the committee because I used the hon. member's name, and it should be the Member for Lethbridge-West.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay, Mr. Chairman. I'll review the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development and then turn to the personnel administration office.

A quality adult learning system is a vital part of our efforts to secure a strong future for the province. It gives our citizens the tools they need to succeed in the present and in the future. It provides our employers with the skilled workers they need. It helps us attract new clean industries to the province, because we can offer the resource they most need, which is renewable human talent. To research the system also helps generate the ideas and technologies that keep Alberta economically competitive in a changing marketplace.

Now, let me refresh your memories about Alberta adult learning. The list of learning providers includes 22 public postsecondary institutions, four private university colleges, four community consortia, and 83 community adult learning councils, as well as a growing number of private vocational schools, certified private providers, and nonresident institutions. The system serves nearly 17,000 students in adult upgrading programs, about 30,000 apprentices, and the equivalent of 123,000 full-load students in postsecondary education. About half of those students receive financial assistance from the province.

All of this and a growing availability of noncredit, tailor-made, and on-the-job programming make Albertans well known both nationally and internationally for their skills and knowledge and for their passion for learning more. We want to keep that reputation strong. To do so, I'm asking you to invest \$274 million in adult learners, \$1.06 billion in adult learning, and \$16 million to administer it. That's an almost 8 percent increase from last year's forecast and a 25 percent increase over the last three years. I'm also asking for \$66 million in nonbudgetary disbursements to pay this year's interest in remission costs on student borrowing.

This year, next year, every year we strive to meet the goals that Albertans have set for a quality adult learning system: accessible education, relevant learning in a responsive system, affordable learning, strong university research, all of it effectively administered by government and its partners. Ensuring accessibility means that we continue to meet Albertans' increasing demands for learning opportunities. We are continuing to aim at our goal of accommodating 23,000 additional students by the year 2005. Through the access fund we will continue to invest in expansion.

We accepted the challenge raised by the Hon. Lorne Taylor and the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority in their strategy for the information and communications technology sector.

We refer to it as ICT. We supported the Premier's commitment during his televised address to create an additional 35,000 new jobs in ICT by the year 2005. So with input from postsecondary institutions and the high-tech industry, we established priorities for the access fund.

We will dedicate \$51 million to creating an additional 1,000 new spaces in postsecondary programs in engineering, computer science, and multimedia. We are supporting 21 different programs which are in high demand by students and which have high employment rates for graduates. We have also issued the challenge to industry to supplement those efforts with scholarships for students, co-op work experience, equipment, and other partnerships.

Access to learning also includes access to postsecondary programs as well as a wide range of other adult learning programs. We support access to a full range of learning opportunities from the ABCs to the PhDs. For example, we are introducing a new family literacy initiative. We want to give young parents with insufficient education a second chance to learn and a new opportunity to teach their children the value of education. We will support new family literacy programs to be administered by community groups who rely on volunteer tutors.

Accessible learning also includes apprenticeship programs, which combine on-the-job training with formal classroom education. Alberta has long been a national leader in apprenticeship training. We now have a record number of registered apprentices. In fact this is over 30,000. Registrations have increased by more than 30 percent over the last three years. Each of those apprentices is a testament to the value employers place on this type of training and to Albertans' optimism about the future of trades and technologies.

To ensure that a growing number of registered apprentices have access to the training they need, we are accommodating capacity for the formal classroom component of apprenticeship by an additional \$5 million this year and \$5 million again next year. We are also introducing a number of changes to make apprenticeship programs more worker friendly. For example, some institutions now offer technical training one day a week so workers are not away from a busy jobsite for an extended period. Other trades are benefiting from distance delivery. For example, NAIT uses telecommunications to bring learning to apprenticeship electricians.

Our future prosperity will be built by computer professionals, by skilled tradespeople, and by parents who help their children value lifelong learning. Our prosperity will also be built by researchers, the people who are creating new ideas and turning them into innovative medicines and technologies. We're giving those researchers the tools they need through the intellectual infrastructure partnership program, affectionately known as I2P2, as part of our support for research excellence. We'll be investing \$75 million over five years.

With funding from this program to date we have supported an innovative centre at the University of Calgary, a state-of-the-art institute for biomolecular design at the University of Alberta, and a science annex for biotechnology at the University of Lethbridge. These projects will allow researchers to conduct engineering, biomedical, and agricultural research using the best equipment and facilities. The year ahead will see additional support for more essential research equipment and facilities like these.

I2P2 works in partnership with the Canada Foundation for Innovation and with the private sector. The last round of I2P2 funding committed \$19.8 million for projects with a total value of over \$114 million.

8:20

Now speaking of value, let me address another goal: affordability.

Education remains the best investment a person can make. Education levels have a direct bearing on the number of employment options, on income levels, yes, on overall health, and on volunteer activity; in other words, on quality of life. As a society and as individuals we benefit from continued learning. The cost of postsecondary education is a responsibility to be shared among learners, their families, taxpayers, and the private sector. Those who can afford to pay should do so. Those who cannot afford to pay are given financial assistance.

We're taking a number of steps to ensure that financial need is not a barrier to accessing learning. First, we are making resources available through the Alberta opportunity bursaries. Second, we are seeing a response to our persistent lobbying that the federal government pay its fair share of reducing student debt. The millennium scholarships will benefit Alberta students by about \$28 million. Average awards will be about \$3,000, and our goal is to ensure that qualifying students receive their share by this coming January.

There is also, of course, repayable assistance in the form of student loans. This year living allowances used to calculate a student's eligibility for assistance are being increased to reflect rising costs of living, particularly rent. In addition we are increasing loan limits by \$300 to accommodate increased tuition and living costs.

Another of our goals is responsiveness, ensuring that the adult learning system meets the needs of individual learners and the province. Part of responsiveness is the element of choice, encouraging young people to make good choices about education, about careers, and about the future. In partnership with Alberta Education we will expand the information available to high school students about choices, careers, and the future. We will expand a successful pilot project in Red Deer, where staff from our career development centre did presentations in local schools. They provided information about student funding, exchange programs, and learning opportunities across the province. They led professional development sessions for teachers to expand staff career-related skills, and they made their labour information centre, their career library, more youth friendly.

We are finding other new ways to reach young people. We ran a very successful pilot program in Edmonton and Calgary called Youth Connections. Maybe you've seen the painted buses or heard the ads on the radio. We developed a program to help young people assess their interest, look at career options, get the right training, and find a job. We worked with industry associations and community agencies and recruited private-sector partners to offer mentoring and employment opportunities. We worked with young people and helped them connect with new opportunities. Based on these successes, we will extend Youth Connections to other communities in the province.

We are taking additional measures to encourage excellence both in our young people and across the learning system. To support a bright future for our exceptional high school students, we have substantially increased the core Alberta heritage scholarships. Our brightest young people will soon earn \$18.5 million per year, an additional \$5 million over last year.

We are also encouraging and rewarding excellence in the postsecondary system with performance-based funding. In 1997-98 Alberta was the first province to link funding with measures like graduate employment rates, satisfaction levels, and administrative overhead. The initiative is successful because there's a long-term reward for institutional improvement. Through the performance envelope operating grants have increased by 4 percent over the last two years and are set to increase by 8 percent over the next three years. In '99-2000 the increase will be 2 percent, and it will be 3 percent in each of the following two years.

Over the next three years other support in our business plan

includes \$40 million for infrastructure renewal and \$30 million for integrating learning and technology.

Accessible education, relevant learning, a responsive system, affordable learning, strong university research, all of which are effectively administered by a system that works together: those are the goals that we aim for. Campus Alberta is a vision for sustaining our ability to meet these goals and to continue to offer quality lifelong learning to Albertans. The Premier described Campus Alberta like this: one big campus where students enrolled in one postsecondary institution can take courses from any other college or university in the province either on-site or on-line from their homes or on the job. Campus Alberta brings postsecondary institutions together to make that network system of learning a reality.

For example, it supports colleges delivering university level programs on a local college campus. In fact the recent access fund announcement supported several university transfer programs offered by colleges. Our vision is that Campus Alberta will accommodate everyone, with proper recognition for previous learning so that people do not have to repeat courses. With people being able to transfer between institutions easily and with people having access to libraries across the province, Campus Alberta will help to ensure that Alberta learning is accessible to Albertans. I see Campus Alberta as how we move forward to meet many of the new challenges we face. In the months ahead, I'll be working with board chairs, administrators, faculty, students, and Albertans. We need to discuss the idea and agree on the finer points of what Campus Alberta will look like. Then we need to make it happen.

Some of the work has already begun. I asked a group of institutional board chairs to begin defining what Campus Alberta could be. The results of our discussions will be in a paper to be issued next month. So far we are focusing on collaboration and building on our strengths. We have already incorporated those ideas into policy decisions, most notably the recent access fund. In the months ahead I will continue to meet with students, institutions, and other Albertans to discuss the challenges ahead and how we respond to them. More importantly, we will look at how we can sustain our ability to offer quality lifelong learning to adult Albertans.

Now, I would like to make a few comments about the Alberta personnel administration office or PAO. PAO is also in the business of developing people. In this case we're working to create a strong Alberta public service. As the government's central human resource agency, PAO ensures that a capable, skilled, and versatile workforce is available to meet the needs of the people of Alberta. We are succeeding. The Alberta public service has undergone dramatic changes since 1992. We have created a more efficient and effective public service while achieving over \$350 million in annual payroll savings. In fact, the Alberta public service is now recognized as one of the most dynamic and innovative public service organizations in North America and a key ingredient in the province's competitive advantage.

PAO's focus in 1999-2000 will continue to be on the corporate human resource development strategy aimed at responding to demographic pressures, growing competition for scarce human resources, and rapidly changing skill needs. We will do this through targeted strategies that, first, foster continuous learning, second, develop leaders for tomorrow, and third, attract and retain new graduates and skilled employees. We will also conduct collective bargaining with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Our collective agreement with the union contains a wage reopener clause for 1999. So those are some of the priorities ahead.

For today, I appreciate your support for the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development and for the personnel administration office and for our initiatives in the years ahead. Now I would invite your questions.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister. We couldn't agree more that a quality adult learning system is in the best interests of Albertans, and we're pleased to try to offer some questions this evening that will hopefully help promote that kind of quality that I think we all want.

I would like to talk about a number of areas and then come back to some general questions. I thought I'd start with the performance measures that we find in the business plans and the ones that are also in the department's annual report. My reference is the Auditor General, on page 25 under Executive Council. I took the opportunity to address the performance and client satisfaction surveys, and one of the cautions the Auditor General makes is at the beginning of his report. If I could just quote, it says that "there is a risk satisfaction surveys may be used to manipulate or 'window-dress' reported performance." Then the Auditor General goes on to make some recommendations about the performance measures.

8:30

I think the key performance measures that we find in the business plans are fairly traditional. I think we'd find them in most reports or business plans such as this. But there are other governments that include some other important indicators, particularly when you're trying to look at the quality of a department such as this and the institutions it works with and serves.

One of the measures that we don't find here is a measure of the instructor/student ratios. They're in other documents, but we don't find them in the business plans. I wondered if there had been any consideration given to that. I know it's difficult, because within institutions you'll get a variety of ratios. The ones at the university I think are something like 3.5 to 1 in the Faculty of Medicine and up to 20 to 1 in the Faculty of Science, so I know there are some difficulties in tracking that. But generally on an institutionwide basis across the province I think it should be interesting to note those ratios.

That's a quality ratio that's important to other people that are judging our institutions. It's an important ratio when students are considering coming to institutions in this province. They look at the kinds of class sizes that they're going to be in, and it's certainly important to instructors or faculty who might consider coming to Alberta, because they're obviously interested in the kinds of assignments they'll be able to give and the kind of work they'll do with students and how that might be governed by the size of classes. My question is: has it been considered, and if not, would it be and could it be in the future?

One of the other areas - and it's been a real source of concern in the institutions across the province - is the state of library holdings. With the cuts, there's been a dramatic loss of quality in terms of the library holdings in the province. It's not just because of budget cuts; part of it is the Canadian dollar vis-à-vis where they have to purchase the journals. Just some of the information: the University of Calgary has canceled over 2,500 journals; book purchases have dropped from 40,000 per year in 1992 to 15,000 per year in 1995. The University of Alberta has canceled 4,442 subscriptions since 1997 and has not been able to buy over 200,000 books. I don't have to tell anyone at this table that the library is the heart of those institutions. It's the heart of all of those institutions.

Again, it's a quality measure that I think is worth pursuing, because it, too, says something to students who are considering enrolling in our institutions: what are the library resources like? It certainly says something to researchers that we're trying to attract to

the province, because if you're at all involved in research and teaching, the quality of the library collection is a huge concern. So again, it's another indicator. I wonder if it has been considered, if not in the department's business plan itself, maybe in the business plans the institutions submit to the department. I know that those are still being worked out to some extent. I would urge some indicator, some monitoring of the library holdings to be done if that isn't already being done.

A third one, of course, is the state of equipment in the institutions. I looked at a couple of the business plans of the institutions, and they point out the horrendous problem they're having with equipment and equipment renewal and trying to keep equipment repaired and trying to keep it up to date, the evergreening problem. I'm not sure what the performance measure might be, but it seems to me that monitoring that and keeping some track of that equipment and the state of that equipment again is an important quality measure in terms of people that are judging our institutions and students making their decisions in terms of where they might attend.

One other measure that I think is missing from here and would be useful is measures showing salary comparisons. I had a question in question period the other day about ranking of our institutions - I believe it was the University of Calgary - and the faculty salaries across the province rank about 16 or 17 out of 20 institutions across the country. It seems to me that that's a comparison we would want to keep up front and be concerned about, because if you have top researchers, if you have top faculty and top instructors in institutions looking at coming to this province and, more importantly, at staying and trying to stop the brain drain, then the salaries are an important factor.

We have some local conditions that I think make a difference. It's much less expensive to live here than it is in Toronto or Vancouver, and I think those factors could be worked into a performance measure of some kind, but eventually when they're looking at an array of factors in terms of locating or coming to an Alberta institution, then the salaries we pay and how they compare to other institutions are going to weigh in the decisions they make, among other things the quality of life, the cultural life, where the institution is located, the health care, K to 12 education. Specifically for institutions I'd like to see some sort of salary comparison.

There's information on the per student costs, but what about keeping track of the per student costs? My memory is not as good as it should be on this, but I think in the annual report there is reference to per student costs. I wonder, again, if they should be in the business plans of the department. Just what are those costs and tracking them? There's a measure - again I think it was in the annual report - that looks at students and their reasons for coming to or not coming to an institution, and of course cost is an important reason: the cost of programs and the kind of support. I wonder, just as a sort of aside: is there going to be an incorporation of the annual report measures in the business plan? There are more measures in the report, if I remember right, than there are in the business plan. I think a couple of them, like response, are expanded, and they give us more information than does the business plan.

One of the other measures is really an important measure because it calls the government to match the rhetoric with action, and that's a measure of the fiscal effort of the government. It's fine to say, as we all do, that education and adult education is the number one priority, but I think that if you're going to have that kind of a goal, then there should be an indicator to show that your actions are following your words. Again, I've looked at some other jurisdictions where they look at the amount of the state's gross domestic product and the percentage of that gross domestic product that is invested by the government in education, not just adult education but

education in total, K to PhD and beyond. Alberta's GDP, for example, increased by 8.4 percent from 1990 to 1996, and what happened to the fiscal effort of the province in terms of adult education during that time and what's going to happen in the future I think would be an interesting measure to have in front of us as we consider the investments of the department each year.

8:40

One of the other concerns, and this is getting away - well, let me finish with the performance measures for just a minute. We have performance measures surveys listed here, and one of the things that the Auditor General asked for which I think would be useful - and he asked for a number of things. When we read the measures, we have no idea of the population that was surveyed. I'm not sure how it can be done, whether it can be done in an appendix, but we have no assurance that the survey samples are representative of the population they're reporting on, of the reliability of the survey.

There's none of the kind of technical reporting that the Auditor General on pages 26 and 27 recommended there should be. He basically says that the methodology should be reported upon in terms of people having confidence in the measures that are put before them. I think it's worth doing. Maybe once we get used to the business plans - and I think the business plans have been a good idea. They certainly give us much more information than we ever had in budget estimates before they were instituted. Many ministries are still working through the business plans and trying to refine them to make them better documents. I think it's something, at least initially, that is needed to give people confidence that the material they're reading is in fact so. I believe the Auditor General has put out a document for the ministries to help in the design of those performance measures, which is available to the ministries.

One of the concerns I've heard from institutions as I've traveled the province has been the concern about the growth in the amount of money that the department is earmarking, the money that is now directed out of Edmonton, rather than by individual institution. The figure I was given - and I would be interested to know whether it's confirmed or not. I was told that in the last five years the ministry has moved from controlling 3 percent of funds that were put out in institutions to controlling 17 percent of funds. If that number is true, it's a dramatic drop in the autonomy of institutions, and I think it raises some real questions, particularly about universities and the autonomy of universities. I'm not sure that it's true. I'm sure if I go back to the budget with a calculator, you could do some rough estimates. I'm sure it's a concern of your department too when you start looking at preparing the budget and administering the funds of the department.

Along with the money problems that institutions are facing has been the problem of infrastructure. Again, the Auditor General has been rather blunt in some of his recommendations, and I wonder what the response has been from the department to the kinds of things that the Auditor General has pointed out.

He indicates the critical need for a long-range plan. On page 41 of the Auditor General's report in a sidebar he says: "It is critical that the sector establish a long-range capital budgeting system." It goes on further to say that "long-term capital asset replacement strategies remain ambiguous." He talks about the coming enrollment increasing. How are those increases going to be accommodated in institutions?

Then in another part of the report he talks about facilities crumbling faster than institutions are able to repair them and certainly faster than they're able to replace them. I wonder if that recommendation of the Auditor General has been addressed. If so, what is the plan, and what's been the involvement of the institutions?

If you look through the institutions, some of their business plans and the requests for needed infrastructure, it's horrendous when you look at the total. If you look at the maintenance money that's needed and for renovation, it's really becoming a huge, huge problem. Again the Auditor General indicates that the deterioration continues and the costs increase. So it's a major concern. Certainly as you visit those institutions, it's a concern.

He talks about a \$362 million backlog just to preserve the assets that we have now without going ahead and planning for the future. He also indicates that along with that long-term plan there's a need to manage the system in terms of looking at the risks relating to unfunded deferred maintenance. There are risks, and those risks should be calculated and up front. What are the long-term implications of deferring and deferring and deferring maintenance on the asset? It is a huge asset, when you look across the province at the kind of investment that Albertans have in those institutions.

One of the other areas that I'd like to touch on, if I could, for a few minutes goes back to earmarked funds and the access fund. The access fund, as some of you know, has had some criticism in institutions. There was certainly some creative, to say the least, book work done for institutions to acquire funds from the access fund. [Mr. Massey's speaking time expired] Sorry. Maybe I'll get a chance to finish them off. If I don't finish, I'll send them to you in writing.

Thanks.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few brief, specific questions, the first dealing with the support for adult learning, program 2, on page 25 of the estimates. In item 2.1.5 you talk about other program support, which seems to be looking at quite an increase in funding. I was wondering what specific programs you're talking about there.

Further down on the page, under the public colleges funding . . .

MR. DUNFORD: What was the reference number?

MR. MARZ: Vote 2.1.5.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Thanks.

MR. MARZ: Further down, under 2.4 it would appear that most of the colleges have either stayed the same in funding or have gone up, with very few exceptions. Two of those exceptions are 2.4.9, Lakeland College, and 2.4.13, Olds College, which have taken a decrease of \$317,000 and \$147,000 respectively, both being agricultural colleges. I was wondering what the reasons are for that decrease in funding. I'd appreciate your comments on that.

8:50

If I heard the minister right, in his opening comments he talked about an increase in student loan funding for the coming year, but on page 29 it would appear that there's approximately a \$3 million decrease in student loans. If I didn't hear him right, I'd ask him to correct me on that. What does he attribute the decrease in student loans to on page 29?

The last question I have deals with the key performance measures. It seems like it stands out quite vividly that something is wrong when the public shows only a 75 percent satisfaction rating while students are at 93 percent and employer satisfaction is at 89 percent. Are we not communicating adequately enough to the public the job

we're doing in the department? What is the reason attributed to that discrepancy?

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call on Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, good evening. I had a meeting with the minister this morning. It was an interesting hour and a half, although he took most of the time with us in the first hour or two.

MR. DUNFORD: How do you like me so far?

DR. PANNU: Well, you bring to us a good-news story, I guess, of the department.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. Could you hold your mike a little closer. We can't hear at this end very well.

DR. PANNU: Is it okay now?

Mr. Chairman, with your permission I would like to start with some general observations of the minister's department's business plan. To assess the business plan and the estimates presented by his department, one has to ask some general questions first, I guess, about what the postsecondary education system is about.

I certainly see from a quick look at the goals as stated in the business plan that the postsecondary system is generally seen as a source of preparing Albertans for the world of work. So instead of human resource development, strategy is what seems to reflect the core of concerns and considerations underlying the business plan. Access and affordability considerations are there. Affordability has a sort of double meaning in the language of both the annual report and the business plan, affordability both from the point of view of system managers and the government here being at the top of what we can afford and also, I guess, affordability from the point of view of students and their families, those who use it. That bears on the question of accessibility.

What I find here is a silence in the business plan and/or in the annual report, which is a year old of course, on the clear-cut statement on the issue of equality of opportunity to Albertans who may want to go to our posteducational system, to a variety of institutions at different levels. So that silence about the government's commitment to equalizing opportunity is conspicuous. I would like the minister to state the position of his department and of his government on that issue, to what extent priority should be given to that issue. Because to me the very fact that education, both at the K to 12 level and at the postsecondary level, is primarily funded through - it's a public system. The government of this province on behalf of the citizens of this province commits resources to maintaining this system in good shape, in good form, and functioning. So the question of affordability and accessibility has I think addressed some questions about equality of opportunity.

Now, when I look at the key performance indicators, again I find no reference to the ability of the system, because of the way it now apportions the costs of going to school, due to ever increasing tuition fees and other costs related to going to university or college or a technical institute - there's no reference in the KPIs as to the dropout rates that may be caused by growing financial costs and burdens to students. I tried to find this information in the most recent annual report, 1997-98, and also in the current estimates, and I didn't find any reference to it. Is it because the minister and the department have no concern about it? Is it because there's an assumption that

increasing costs have no bearing on the future decisions of Albertans who may want to go to school but decide not to because they perceive the costs as unreasonably high from their point of view?

The educational provision funded through public institutions and delivered through public institutions is an important social policy arm, always is, not only a labour market related social policy arm but also related to social equity and equality of opportunity. On these latter two counts the business plan and other documents related to it are essentially silent.

The minister also made a reference to the financing of the postsecondary education system as a joint responsibility of four parties, as I understood him to say: students, their families, the Alberta government on behalf of all Albertans, and the private sector. Now, I know that insofar as students and their families are concerned, once they make a decision to take part in the postsecondary education system, the commitment to spend money is not voluntary. The decision is made once you decide to send your child, daughter or son, to school. In the case of Alberta taxpayers and citizens, again I think since we have a broad-based consensus that we as a democratic government will fund to some degree, to a large degree I hope, postsecondary education systems, there's no question of voluntariness. It's a question of expression of values that we have.

Insofar as the private sector is concerned, there's no obligation that can compel the private sector to make commitments as a fourth partner in the scheme of things to pay its share and pay it on a predictable basis. Certainly we feel good when they do make donations - and some of them do, and I appreciate that - but it's more of an act of charity, I guess. We cannot predict what will be coming from year to year, from one business plan to the next. So I want the minister to address that issue. What kind of partnership is he trying to encourage from the private sector in terms of its commitment to carrying its fair share of financing the postsecondary system of education?

Now, I want to move on from there to the issue of the present system of funding our postsecondary institutions, particularly the manner in which the present model of funding and the arrangements of funding impact on students, on faculty, on nonteaching personnel who run colleges and universities and institutes. So let me go over these quickly, Mr. Chairman.

9:00

There's clear evidence - and there were some questions that we explored this morning on this - that the student debt loads, in spite of all the programs to alleviate student financial burdens that have been brought into operation in this province and the commitments that the federal government has made in terms of its millennium scholarship fund, are continuing to grow and grow at a fairly rapid rate. The '97-98 annual report of the department indicates that for students in four-year programs the average debt loads are about \$17,030.

Now, when I look at the chart here, I notice that there's a steady increase of the previous two years that's indicated here, so I would assume that this increase is continuing and that it's likely to go on until the 30 percent cap is reached. The minister I heard perhaps last year saying that that cap will be reached at most of the postsecondary institutions by about the year 2003 or so. I want him to tell us what kinds of assumptions underlie this prediction on his part, this estimate on his part, that the students can hope to see not only a sort of decline in the rate of growth of their tuition fees by that year but that in fact they might see a day when they will stop increasing altogether.

I don't see that happening because the operational costs of running

a college or a university are not within the control of university administrations or this government. There are all kinds of factors that operate that are beyond the control of any authorities that do this. The only way you can do it would be, of course, to limit the salary and pay scales of personnel, people who teach at universities, the people who provide services, in order that those who teach can in fact teach and provide services to students so that they can go and learn.

That clearly raises issues of competitiveness in the marketplace. The minister is I think quite knowledgeable about the dynamic nature of the labour market and how it increases pressures on employers, including those who run public institutions or postsecondary education on our behalf, to have to pay salaries that are competitive, or else two things will happen: they will not be able to attract outstanding academic leaders, and secondly, if they have in the past attracted such leaders, they won't be able to keep them there. So then we begin to hear talk about brain drain.

But in the case of students, you know, the increase in tuition fees, growing ancillary fees in institutions, rising costs related to user fees that are already there for using this lab or that lab, introduction of new fees for xeroxing, and other expenditures - in the past departments and other units in colleges and universities were able to carry these costs themselves. Now they are shifting these to the students. So student burdens are certainly increasing.

The Canadian figures on this - although we don't have the latest figures for Alberta - are quite alarming in terms of the scale of the student debt. The average student debt load has risen from \$5,000 in 1982 to \$25,000 in 1998. Now, it is possible that this figure includes not only undergraduate students but also graduate students. The information that is missing here in the annual report and also in your estimates for this year does not seem to include the debt loads of graduate students, and I want to know what the rationale is for either excluding those students from your report or putting them in a category which can easily be set aside. At the University of Alberta we know that there's an ever growing percentage of students who attend this university who are indeed graduate students, so we need some reporting on their debt loads as well.

I was very interested in this one graduate student who finished her work some years ago at Queen's University or somewhere and went to court in order to get her limits lifted so that she could declare bankruptcy. Mr. Minister, you yourself made it more difficult for our students to declare bankruptcy if they are unable to pay their student loans. Just last year we had a good debate in the Legislature. You then said that you're providing relief, in fact, and protection to students.

Now, if you look at what the students are trying to get from the courts, it would seem that the point of view of the student is exactly the opposite. They see it as in fact putting their well-being in jeopardy by holding them to pay their loans until the end of 10 years or whatever level it is. So I'd like to see some sort of information here on student bankruptcies. How does the minister's department handle these situations?

The issue of debt loads is an important one, and growing debt loads create a serious problem. The bankruptcies in Canada involving student loans have jumped from 11 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 1997. I would like to know and I think Albertans would like to know whether the situation in Alberta parallels the national situation or not.

These issues of dropout rates, retention rates - again, here I understand the rough estimates put the Canadian dropout rate between a low of 10 percent to a high of 50 percent. They're very rough figures. I cannot make sense of them. I want to know in fact if your department can help us understand how we can report on these dropout rates.

In my view the department should include in its performance indicators dropout rates. Show us that there's a declining dropout rate as a result of your policies every year or not. Show us if there are more bankruptcies or fewer bankruptcies from year to year. We would like to know if there are increasing debt loads every year or declining debt loads. These are issues that I think are important ones, and the KPIs - I see them mentioned here in the business plan for this year - simply don't have this information there. I also don't see this information in the annual report. I wonder if you'd consider bringing this information to us and including it in these documents as a reasonable request and a reasonable kind of observation on my part.

Now, impact on faculty. From personal experience and also from visits since my election to this office to postsecondary institutions, I hear again and again the increasing number of part-time faculty and the casualization of faculty appointments that is becoming a prominent fact of life on campuses. I visited with the postsecondary institutions, colleges and universities, and student association in Calgary just about two months ago . . .

MR. DUNFORD: No, he's not talking about workload here.

DR. PANNU: I'm coming to that as well.

One of the things that's happening is that there are two classes of faculty developing at universities. Those young scholars, in fact, who have very heavy debt loads that they carry, also teach as part-time or as sessional appointments, and sessional salaries are much lower than tenure track salaries. So the very people who in fact are now burdened with heavy debt load because they're recent graduates are also the ones who are finding employment in the colleges and the universities which don't pay them enough to pay back their loans. They have to wait for 10 years before they can declare personal bankruptcy thanks to the policy of the federal government and also of your department, Mr. Minister. So I would like you to comment on that.

Workloads are increasing. Certainly sessional appointees teach a lot more than do full-time tenure track academics. So there is, as I said, a sort of dual labour market being created in the universities, creating a new kind of potential problem for work conditions, job satisfaction conditions, and workload distribution.

9:10

Overcrowding of facilities of course is a result of government having put a stop to major capital investments in new facilities. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has already drawn attention to this; you know, the libraries, the labs. Mr. Chairman, I will just complete with that one last sentence.

So these are some of the questions. I hope that I will get, finally, some detailed answers for these. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. I'll call on the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll start off, Mr. Minister, with a simple question. I'm sure I missed the press announcement somewhere along the line, but I notice that in the revenue projections, page 47 of your business plan in the Right Balance book, it's showing a decrease from the 1998 budget of \$2.2 million in other revenue to the '99-2000 estimate of \$705,000. Now, I know why there was a big change between '97-98 and '98-99, which had to do with cost recovery from AVCs, but could you just refresh our memory about the change from '98-99 to '99-2000?

I'm going to try to be brief because a number of other members of

the committee have questions. I'm going to try to focus my questions on the performance measures. I want to thank you for putting into your business plan little asterisks to mark the performance measures and activities of your ministry that link to the growth summit. It fell to officials within your department to make sense of people development. I'll never forget the Premier's press conference when he said: you know, you've got people and you've got development, and if you put them together, you get people development. So thank you for trying to make some sense of it. You are making some progress.

The first one of your measurements that I want to talk to you about is the participation rate in Alberta postsecondary education. The measure you use is "Albertans age 17 and over in all types of credit and non-credit learning activities." The measurement that you use is a 1993 figure. It's getting to be seven years old. It indicates that Alberta is currently ranking number one overall, but I understand that if you take a finer look at that figure in terms of credit courses and university entrance and college entrance, you get a much different picture. So I'm interested to know whether . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Would the member mind if I clarified that?

MR. SAPERS: That's fine.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Go ahead.

MR. DUNFORD: My understanding is that the performance measurement there is based on statistics from Stats Canada. The federal government didn't supply information - what year was it? - in '95, so we didn't have that number to use. They did, however, do their surveying or collecting of the data for '98, and we're anticipating, then, that we would receive an updated number. I agree with you that we show in our report a 1993 number. I mean, that's old, but that's the most recent we have.

MR. SAPERS: Okay. I appreciate that clarification, and while you're pushing Stats Canada, it seems to me that some of the literature I've read has indicated that the measurement is much more meaningful when you segregate it by, as I say, university entrance, college entrance, and employment-related or employment-sponsored postsecondary education. I think that in terms of the goal of accessibility, that would be one of the measurements. I think that would be more useful to all of us.

Because of some of the activities you've initiated in terms of making postsecondary education more accessible to identifiable groups within Alberta society, I'm also interested to know whether or not you'll be collecting some information on participation rate - for example, amongst aboriginals, amongst youth, amongst seniors, amongst women, amongst new Canadians - or whether you're going to leave the performance measure at a simple aggregate measure.

The next performance measure that I wanted to talk to you about is a slightly different set of questions than those of either of the two previous speakers regarding the affordability goal. I note that your performance measure target under Sources of Revenue Used to Fund Credit Programs is to "ensure tuition revenue does not exceed the 30% cap," which reads very much to me like the cap has become the target. That was a point in our debate on that bill, and that bill of course was not the private member's bill, which would have capped the tuition at 20 percent, but the government bill, which eventually became proclaimed. So my first concern is that in fact that fear that the cap has become the target has been realized.

My second question is that I notice there is nothing in the measurement to deal with balance in terms of those revenue streams.

If tuition is used to fund 30 percent, the target doesn't say what percent Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development should be. The target doesn't say what student fees should be. It doesn't say what other revenue should be. I'm concerned that without articulating some of those targets, we may be seeing some policy being made sort of on the fly. I mean, de facto we may see either postsecondary institutions becoming reliant on other sources of income or defining traditional sources of income in new ways simply to get around the way that you're doing the measurement. I'd be interested to know what in fact your policy is on other sources of revenue, and I'd be interested to see some specifics in the performance measure.

The next performance measures that I have questions about have to do with competence and versatility, I believe. Maybe it's the whole public administration office; you don't have them broken out. I'm looking at the goal for alignment and commitment in your business plan, and the performance indicator is percentage "of employees who understand how their work contributes to their department's business plan." I never thought about this one before I read it, and then I began to get a little worried because the baseline measurement indicates that about three-quarters of department employees have a good understanding of "how their work contributes to their department's business plan." Then the target is only 80 percent.

9:20

Now, I happen to think we have a public service in this province to be exceptionally proud of, and I happen to believe that the men and women who work for the province of Alberta have done so under incredible stress and duress over the last few years with all the change. I'm not being political about that. It's been incredibly stressful. My comment is not critical about the workforce, but it seems to me that from a management level, from a government policy level we've got a problem on our hands if only three-quarters of our employees understand how their work contributes to the department they're working for. When the goal is that only 80 percent will have a good understanding, it reinforces that concern that I have.

MR. DUNFORD: So it should be 100 percent. Is that what you're saying?

MR. SAPERS: Well, you know, I guess 100 percent is ideal, but three-quarters can't be acceptable. Now, you've set it at 80 percent, so that shows you're going to try harder, and it's important. But it just really makes me scratch my head when I see that. As I say, I'm not being critical about the people in the front line delivering the services. They're doing, I'm sure, what is expected of them and what they're being asked to do and what they feel fulfills their job description. But if at the end of the day they then report back through their chain of command that they still don't understand how all that contributes to the department business plans, it sort of reminds me of Peter Drucker when he was saying that the most useless thing is doing exceptionally well that which should never be done at all. I'm wondering whether we've got some of that going on.

The other one was the competence and versatility performance measure, and this is related because it's the percentage "of managers who report their employees have skills to meet current and future needs." I notice that there is no baseline measurement, and I notice you're relying on the core measures survey. Now, I don't know whether there's no baseline measurement because you never asked the question before or whether you did and you got a lousy number.

Why is there no baseline? Again, the language used for the target is to maintain it at 80 percent. So if you don't have a baseline, that wouldn't be a maintenance function. Maybe you can clarify that for me: why do you describe it as maintaining at 80 percent if you don't have a baseline measure?

A general question about both of those performance measures, Mr. Minister, is: how did you get 80 percent? You asked me rhetorically back: well, should it be 100 percent? I'm being very candid; I don't know. I don't know whether that's reasonable or not, but how did you determine 80 percent for both of those measures?

The last question I have about performance measures. From the same part of your business plan, I'm curious to know how we compare in terms of health safety and wellness with other jurisdictions. I have no context to relate the 108 days per 100 person years of time lost due to accidents and injuries, so I don't know whether that's something to be proud of or not. Your goal is to maintain it or reduce it. I do have some sense of the "time lost due to general illness" measure, which is 4.5 days per year. It doesn't say that in your performance measure, but I'm certain it's during a calendar year.

My memory of looking at information in that regard is that that's a bit high, and I'd like to know whether that was higher last year than in previous years in the government's recent experience. I'm told - and I have no way of determining this - that within the public service there has been an increase in time away from work due to illness, stress, et cetera. Now, I don't know whether that's true. At this point it's just information that's been passed along to me without any sort of evidence. So maybe you can tell me whether or not this 4.5 days is higher than what has been the government's experience in the past. If so, what are you going to do to reduce it? Because I'm sure that would be your goal, not to maintain it.

Mr. Minister, as I indicated, I know there are many members of this committee that have questions. If I forfeit a couple of my times, can my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar use my remaining minutes, Mr. Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. We have to go on to the next on the list. Sorry.

MR. SAPERS: We have to go on to the next speaker. It's 25 after 9. I've tried to be exciting. I sure wasn't trying to be stimulating. [interjection]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Through the chair, please.

MR. SAPERS: Well, the apprenticeship critic just wanted to make sure that he had some time, so I'll either be his puppet and he'll feed me the questions or maybe we can - as long as we can carve out some time for him, Mr. Chairman. That's all I'm concerned about.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: As I said, I have to go by my speakers' list, and I've got another hon. member that wishes to speak. If you're done, we'll go on to the next member. If not, continue.

MR. SAPERS: I'll hold my peace, then, in the hope that we'll be able to get back to my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have several questions from the '99-2000 estimates here. The first question is relating to an item on page 27, Youth Connections, and it also

relates to page 32 under Major Strategies. The major strategy listed there is to "expand the Youth Connections program," and of course as we look on page 27, when we look at the figures, we see obviously there is going to be an expansion. I'm just wondering what really is intended there. What's involved in that program? Perhaps you could clarify that for me. That's 3.2.8.

Just below 3.2.8, 3.2.9, I notice athletic scholarships, and there's nothing mentioned there for this year or last year. I'm wondering why the item is there at all. This must be a throwback to something from previous times. Perhaps you could clarify that.

On the previous page, page 26, I notice the Banff Centre. I had a chance to tour the Banff Centre last fall. The expenditure is \$9,054,000. I wonder if you could just provide a little more detail on the total cost of running that institution and how this figure may relate to that.

A little bit lower there on the same page, under intellectual infrastructure partnerships, I notice quite a decrease in the amount of money allocated for that particular item, from \$22.8 million to \$15 million. I'm just wondering if you might provide some further information on the reason for that.

Page 29, Alberta heritage scholarships, an increase from \$13 million to \$17 million. You talked about the increase in the value of the scholarships, and I imagine that's why there is that increase. But I'd be interested in knowing whether there's actually an increase in the number of scholarships as well. In other words, maybe you could just indicate how much of that would be because of the increased value and how much because of the increased volume.

On page 33, under Highlights for 1999-2000, you indicate that "the Ministry will transfer capital assets with a market value of \$95 million to four post-secondary institutions." I wonder if you might just indicate which institutions and maybe expand on that a bit.

9:30

On page 34, since I have a private university college in my own constituency, I'm kind of interested in the statistics there under 1994-95 Graduates Employed. Certainly the statistics are very, very high, right up there with the universities, 95 percent of the graduates employed, but it's rather interesting to me that only 58 percent of them are employed in related work and 37 percent are employed in unrelated work. Those figures are very different from all the other figures in the other institutions, and I'm just wondering if you may have some explanation or know anything further on why that is the case.

Finally, on page 32, the federal millennium scholarships, you talk about the delivery of student assistance there and "working with the . . . government to harmonize the design and delivery of student loans." Maybe you can just update me on how that's coming and how the millennium scholarships actually are fitting into our own provincial scholarships.

I think those are all the questions I have, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few questions this evening to ask the hon. minister in my role as apprenticeship critic. Also, I'm grateful for the time. Could he please explain to us, page 26, line 2.8.1, the program delivery support, why there is an estimated decrease of funding of over 12 percent in the operating expense area. What resources are expected to be lost due to this decrease?

[Mr. Hierath in the chair]

Directly below that, the item concerning marketing apprenticeship. All members are aware of the lack of skilled trades workers in this province. There's particularly a great concern in the roofing industry of exactly where we're going to get all the roofers that are going to be needed in this province in the next five years. Why is this area being cut, all funding? Will the services provided by this area be transferred to a different area? What will happen to the staff that worked in this area? I would be very grateful if in due time the minister could answer those questions for me.

Also, if he could provide us with an update as to how the apprenticeship programs that I understand are being organized by NAIT in the Philippines are developing and how those workers are doing with the Alberta standards.

We have significant changes in the journeyman to apprentice ratio in the trades. I would like an outline of what is going to be proposed. Presently many people would like to see the 2 to 1 ratio maintained, and there are other people who are very anxious to see a 1 to 1 ratio. How will this affect safety on the job? Does the minister feel that safety training of apprentices will be compromised if we have one-on-one training or one-and-two training, as it's called in the trades. If he could update us on that, I would be grateful.

I would also like to know in this next year if there are going to be any proposals to reduce the number of compulsory trades. We know firsthand now with the strike that's occurred out in Hinton that with compulsory trades you must hold a ticket if you are to work at that described job. This is a very important issue. It's an issue that's brought a major industry in Hinton, the major employer - this issue has brought the town to a virtual standstill. It's very important, and I hope we can address this, and I would like to see enforcement of this.

We all know that there are problems in this province with the enforcement of trade qualifications, and I would like to know how many members of his department are actively employed in enforcing trade regulations.

[Mr. Severtson in the chair]

There are many other questions that I have. If we have the time, I would like the minister to comment on how his program of grandfathering people in the trades is working.

The Alberta qualification certificate program. The old fee was \$25 when the program was started five years ago. I understand it was withdrawn for a while, and then it was reimplemented here three years ago with a significantly larger fee of over \$400. We know that there's a shortage of welders in the province, and by the time they pay for all their tests, their welding coupons and their CWB, their B pressure, whatever - some of these fees can run as high as \$700. If we're serious about attracting qualified people to the province - and some of these construction jobs are for short duration - a \$700 fee is a considerable deterrent for someone to come here and qualify with our standards and then perhaps have four to six weeks of work and then leave the province. I would like to first know from the minister if he considers this a problem, and if he does consider it a problem, what is he doing to address that?

Another issue that comes to mind that I find startling is that some industries and some industry groups are determined to initiate their own apprenticeship training, and this is a significant move, I believe. A lot of individuals I speak to are not satisfied with the direction they're getting from your department with apprenticeship training, and they think it's in their best interest to strike out by themselves. I would like to know how the minister feels about this.

I would like to also know from the minister what advantages he sees with RAP. Is he going to further encourage young Albertans,

those in the last year or two of high school, and is he going to increase the focus of RAP, the registered apprenticeship program? What future does he see for that? If he could clarify that at this time, I would be grateful.

9:40

The last issue that I have concerning apprenticeships is the whole issue of qualification I would like to note now, Mr. Chairman, that the minister has been, I feel, quite responsible in dealing with this issue, and that is the issue of individual companies issuing their own trade tickets without testing, without any sort of formal instruction. Individuals are given tickets that indicate that they are skilled in specific trades, and when they're questioned on this, they reply that this card is simply a means of identification on the job. The minister, as I said before, and his staff, to their credit have, I believe, tried to resolve this very serious issue. I know that it's continuing to go on, and that indicates to me that in his department there are not enough field inspectors.

With those questions, I await the minister's answers, and if he does not have time, he can certainly reach me via letter. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Very good.

I'll call on the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay. Well, there are . . .

DR. MASSEY: Enough to keep you busy.

MR. DUNFORD: It is rather an extensive list. I'll go through and try to deal with some of them, as many as I can. Of course what we're unable to deal with this evening, we'll certainly provide written answers then in the normal way.

I enjoyed the comments of members when it came to performance measurements. I think it's extremely important that we as the department are accountable, and of course, one of the ways to be accountable is to have some sort of a qualitative and perhaps in some cases quantitative measurement system. I believe that our business plans are getting better, when I think back to what it was like around here in 1994 and '95 when we first started off on this venture of having business plans, just how elementary, I guess, some of those plans were. With the comments and the requests for more information I think we're seeing that, you know, we're part of an evolution here as we work towards something that would be better.

As many of you of course know, I am a strong proponent of variable pay based on performance. I'm a strong proponent of achievement bonuses for civil servants of all stripe, from bargaining unit employees on the front line right up to deputy ministers, and the only way in which to satisfy and be accountable to the Alberta public and particularly the taxpayer I believe is if we have a good measurement system on which we can then base our decisions.

So I welcome all of the comments that people have made about performance measures. I didn't hear anything in terms of the questions as to why something was not there that startled me or upset me. I think it's something that we have to continue to work toward.

I would like to point out, though, that one of the measurements that we have within Advanced Education and Career Development and within the personnel administration office is the fact that 2 percent of our budget goes to administration. We're extremely proud of that fact, because that is an indicator to the members present and to any people who wish to read and of course to

calculate from our business plan that 98 percent of dollars that we get from limited budgets we're putting into the field, into the institution or into a student's pocket. I always want to be cognizant of trying to do that.

As a matter of fact, if I try to skip ahead a little bit, still dealing with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, still in his area but sort of getting off the chronological order, I've been very hard on institutions about new buildings. This is now changing, of course, with the business plan that you're currently looking at. Certainly, during the early part of my watch in this ministry, I used at many times the opportunity to tell institutions that to me buildings were the last resort. Well, I had to make an exception to that. This is the snake story.

We were under pressure from quite a number of . . .

MR. SAPERS: Is this going to be funnier than your Y2K story?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I don't know. You'll have to judge. You missed the Y2K story, which I still thought was quite funny.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, I didn't hear it.

MR. DUNFORD: Oh, you didn't hear the Y2K story?

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, that might have to be another time, but the snake story. A number of institutions were bringing forward proposals for capital projects, and we were saying: no, no, no. I was almost like, over my dead body type of thing but wasn't quite there. Then we get the story from Medicine Hat College. What happened allegedly was that the director of the health sciences programs in Medicine Hat had walked into her office on, I guess, a Monday morning only to find that colleagues of hers were trying to play a trick on her by laying this rubber snake on her carpet. As she went over to pick up this rubber snake, it turned out that it was a live snake that had crawled in. Well, as soon as we heard that story here within the ministry, we gave them the money to replace that building. I was down there on . . . [interjections] Hey, this is my joke. When you guys are here, you can have your jokes.

I want to finish up this point by saying that last Friday we were in Medicine Hat, of course, to cut the ribbon or to unveil the plaque for this health sciences building, and I told them they better bronze that snake because it certainly had worked in their favour. That's my rather clumsy way, Dr. Massey, of getting around to the question about infrastructure and the long-range plan and certainly the Auditor General and his comments about the backlog and deferred maintenance.

One of the things that we have made very clear, I think, to the institutions is that while we were not interested in capital projects, we were not giving them any slack in terms of not taking care of the assets that they had at their disposal. Certainly we understand that when you have a 21 percent cut in budget and then a 7 percent increase in enrollment, you've got some tremendous productivity gains that happen. Also, there's some pretty heavy strain, then, on your facilities. So we think that we've been working very closely with them to make sure that there hasn't been a deterioration, but we know that we're perhaps at the margin right now. There's not a lot of room left in their budgets to be working in this area, so I hope that we'll be mindful of that in future years.

Your comment about instructor to student ratios. I'm a bit

ambivalent in that sense. I know that from a positive standpoint the University of Lethbridge, that's in my constituency, has been able to attract students from a fairly broad area but specifically from the city of Calgary because of what is perceived as relatively good instructor/student ratios. Of course, you know, Lethbridge, like any of the other institutions within our system, has seen an increase in those ratios, and I'm not sure that we would measure our outputs simply on that particular fact.

9:50

As a matter of fact, part of what Campus Alberta is all about is that we find the strengths we have within our faculties, wherever they are in the province, and we multiply them. In fact we would anticipate, then, as just a normal occurrence happening in Campus Alberta, that there would be likely some sort of an increase in instructor/student ratios because of the implementation or the utilization of technology to deliver the strength of a political science professor or chemistry professor across this province.

I should stress at this particular point in time that Campus Alberta is not a code word for rationalization. We don't view Campus Alberta as a cost saving measure. In fact, when we start talking about delivery through some of this technology, we know that we're probably into some costly operations. Certainly Campus Alberta is not, again, a code word for shutting down facilities. If we were to fly in from Mars, all of us here in this room tonight, and were to take a look at Alberta and its demographics and we decided that we wanted to set up a postsecondary education system that was certainly capable of delivering a high-quality education to Albertans, then we would likely place institutions about where they are currently. So for the numbers that I talked about earlier, I want to indicate that we see each of them playing a role. Now, it might be an altered role, but certainly we're going to need all of the present institutions that we have.

I'm just looking at the time. There was a concern that was raised about the library holdings, and that was a real concern about the time that I was succeeding the previous minister. You're aware, I believe, hon. member, that we use the knowledge networks to try to come to grips with many of those problems. I would also indicate to you now that the Alberta Library, or the Campus Alberta interface, as they're now starting to refer to it, is an initiative to connect all of the libraries both at the public institutions and the public libraries throughout the province in order to enhance, then, any individual institution's library holdings. Again I would make a reference to Campus Alberta.

The state of equipment was raised as a concern, and again I would point to the access fund, to the research excellence envelope, I2P2, and the infrastructure renewal program as all envelopes and initiatives that we have in attempting to come to grips with that situation.

I'm going to move down just a little bit because I want to make sure, with the time that I have, that we get to the fiscal effort of the government. Maybe to paraphrase your remarks about walking the talk, hon. member, I would point out to the members present that we are talking about a 7.7 percent increase this year. I believe it's something like 19 percent over the business plan period that this year is the start of. But also, to look back, we have increased funding in this particular area of 25 percent over the past three years.

I would just want, without having the information in front of me, to give you an anecdotal view. In a recent discussion with the minister of education for Ontario, he was indicating to me that within his ministry, as members might know, they have both the K to 12 system and the postsecondary system. He broke down his \$18

billion budget in this way: \$15 billion went to the K to 12 system and \$3 billion to the postsecondary. I would simply want to point out, then, that here in Alberta by having the separate ministries, we have an Education department that's able to focus on K to 12 and advocate fully for its needs and its concerns. Certainly we in Advanced Education and Career Development also share the same responsibility for advocating for the postsecondary system on their behalf. So when we talk about fiscal efforts of the government, I think it not only shows up in the fact that we are increasing funding but also in the fact that, to this point anyway, we have held to the importance of two ministries.

I can't resist talking about the information that you provided about department earmarking. I don't know if your numbers are right, the 3 percent to 17, but I'll bet you we've tripled it anyway. I'll bet you it's 10 percent, and that has been deliberate. There was an experience by the class of '93, at least on the government side, that there was an accountability question with the postsecondary system. When we came up here as a caucus to put our little stamps on government, one of the areas where we wanted to ensure this would happen was in the area of the postsecondary system. I am, for the time being, a big advocate of the envelopes that we use because we're able, then, to ensure that our reinvestment is targeted at specific areas that this government feels are important. So it's the sort of thing that doesn't have to go on from now until eternity but certainly is something that we can see for the foreseeable future.

The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' comments were about specific points in the programs, and we'll respond in writing to that. You mentioned, though, the differences in the satisfaction rating when you looked at students and employers that are attached to the system, and you also talked about the public. I think what's happening in the postsecondary system is similar to what's happening, in my view, within the health system, in that there's a disconnect between a person's actual experience inside the system and how they view the system working for others.

I believe it's fair for me to say that when we survey postsecondary students and families of postsecondary students, they are generally satisfied, and we show the numbers of the service and the quality they received from the system. But when you ask the very same person, "How do you think others are gaining access or being serviced and the quality they're receiving?" they don't think others are getting the same type of thing they are. I have no explanation for that other than perhaps what you suggested, that the disconnect is probably coming in the order of our ability to communicate with Albertans generally about just what an excellent health system and what an excellent postsecondary system we have in this province.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona wanted to take me to task for student tuitions. Also, I believe the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talked about the cap as a target. I'll confess that I think the cap has become a target, and I don't know if any of us were naive to think perhaps otherwise. So when you look at tuitions, what you have in Alberta is a small number of institutions that are basically at the 30 percent cap, but you have a number of them that have some ways to go. They will be hitting the cap, I think, in 2001, 2002, somewhere in that area. Then you have some of the outlying colleges where I don't know if they'll ever hit the 30 percent.

10:00

This government has a policy that those who can afford to pay will pay, and for those who can't afford to pay, we'll find a way to get them into the system. I find it interesting; my phone isn't ringing with people calling me because they couldn't get into the system. I would agree with the comments that you made and that

other members of the opposition have made that we probably should get a better handle on people who haven't been able to get into the system. We'll be glad to get into that at another time.

Do I make the motion now that we rise and report?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That we adjourn and rise and report progress.

MR. DUNFORD: Okay.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development has moved adjournment and that we rise and report progress. All in favour?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[The subcommittee adjourned at 10:02 p.m.]