

## Speaking Points

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Minister of Advanced Education and Technology

Creating Rural Connections Conference 2011

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15 minutes

## **Introduction**

- Thank you, Jason [*Dewling, Associate Dean of Arts, Science, Business and Academic Services, Lakeland College*] and good morning, everyone.
- It really is great to see so many representatives from our post-secondary institutions...and all levels of government...here this morning.
- Because when it comes to post-secondary education in Alberta...

...particularly in rural Alberta...

...we've all got a stake in it...and a role to play.

- As the new Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, I'm particularly excited about working with all of you and contributing to our province's success.
- And make no mistake...our post-secondary system is arguably the most important factor in Alberta's future success.
- This morning, I'm going to tell you why...and the role your organizations can play in that future.
- That's a pretty easy subject as far as I'm concerned...

...because our post-secondary system is a subject that I've got a lot of interest in...both professionally and personally.

- As Minister, it's truly an honour for me to build on the success and momentum of Campus Alberta...

...which was started by former Advanced Education Minister Clint Dunford...whose riding I now serve.

- Campus Alberta was his brainchild...and what a brilliant idea it was.
- Thanks to Clint...and the ongoing efforts of people across the province... Alberta now has a post-secondary education system...

...a system where institutions and stakeholders work together to serve students better.

- Most jurisdictions I know of have plenty of post-secondary institutions, but not a system.
- In some places, their institutions don't even talk to one another.
- Alberta is the only place I know of that has been able to create a collaborative system like Campus Alberta.
- In addition to my role as Minister, I'm also a parent...of two young adults who couldn't be more different in the way they learn.
- And I suspect that...as you consider what I have to say this morning... you're listening with similar professional and personal points of view.

- Of course, you're all here in your professional role...looking for ways to learn from...and network with...one another.
- Those of you who are parents may also be wondering what Alberta's post-secondary education system has in store for your kids.
- Or maybe you're considering a return to school yourself.
- More and more these days, it's not uncommon for adults to return to school after several years in the workforce.
- And that's part of what I want to talk about...

...the changing nature of the "typical" student...if there is such a thing anymore...

...and what our government is doing to meet their needs...

...especially those students in rural Alberta.

- Because their needs are far different from those of students who were entering post-secondary studies 20 years ago. Or even 10 years ago.

### **New Face of Learners**

- Those of you working on the front line with students will know what I'm talking about.

- Our “typical” students are less and less those who enter post-secondary studies straight out of high school.
- More and more, our students are returning to school after having been in the workforce a while.
- They want to study on their own time...and on their own terms.
- They’re studying at night...they’re studying at home...and they’re raising a family while they do it.
- As often as not, they live in a rural area and don’t have the time...or the opportunity...or the resources...to travel back and forth from a post-secondary institution in a larger community to complete their studies.
- Their needs are changing...and that means we need to change too...  
 ...so we can provide the kind of education that best meets their needs...  
 ...in every corner of the province.
- Because...let’s face it...  
 ...if Alberta wants to be a contender on the global stage...  
 ...we need to help every Albertan who wants post-secondary education to get that education.

- That's why...within my ministry...we're challenging ourselves to re-imagine how we can best meet the needs of students whose demographics are changing.
- That's why we're working to strengthen Campus Alberta.

### **Campus Alberta is About Collaboration**

- Because the stronger Campus Alberta is...the more opportunities there will be for Albertans...rural and urban alike.
- The best way to strengthen Campus Alberta is to increase the collaboration and partnership among members of Campus Alberta...

...and that's exactly what the Alberta Rural Development Network is all about.

- This conference is full of examples of the kind of collaboration and partnership I'm talking about.
- I wish my schedule would allow me to stay, because I'd really like to hear each of the presenters share their stories.
- They're all working together to give more Albertans access to the post-secondary education they want.
- Their partnerships are opening doors for people who...up till now...thought that their learning goals were out of their grasp...just because of where they live.

- Their partnerships also giving employers across the province greater access to the skilled workers they're looking for...

...and helping more young people stay in communities where they grew up...

...rather than having to move to larger centres.

- Each of these partnerships is a wonderful example of that old saying...

...“the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.”

- If Campus Alberta is successful, then our province will be successful.

### **Building the Next Generation Economy**

- Because the more students we can help get a post-secondary education...the more it ultimately benefits our province's economic prosperity.
- Relying on our natural resources to keep our economy afloat simply doesn't work any more.
- Alberta's first century was defined by our natural resources...our land, our forests, and our energy.
- Alberta's next century will be defined not by what we have...but by what we know.

- While we once invested in our natural resources...now we're investing in our human resources.
- Knowledge is becoming our most important commodity...and post-secondary education is the key to developing it.
- It's a relatively simple equation.
- To be successful, our economy needs well-trained graduates...  
...whether they come from Keyano College, NAIT or the University of Lethbridge...  
...or any of Alberta's 26 publicly funded post-secondary institutions.
- The better trained and prepared Alberta's graduates are...the better off Alberta's companies are in the global market place.
- The more successful our companies are...the more taxes are generated...the more our businesses give back to the schools that educate their personnel.
- It's a wonderfully positive, self-perpetuating cycle.
- And Campus Alberta is making that cycle even stronger.
- We know that building our knowledge-based economy is the way to remove ourselves from the ups and downs of the boom and bust cycle that's part of a natural resource-based economy.

- Unlike a barrel of oil...the value of knowledge never depreciates...and it's completely renewable.
- That's why our government is keeping our sights on the future...
  - ...and maintaining our investment in post-secondary education and the knowledge-based economy.
- We're strengthening our commitment to the Campus Alberta philosophy.
- We're committed to working with all of the partners in this room to make post-secondary education opportunities accessible...in even the most remote corners of our province.
- Is it a big challenge?
- Yes, it is.
- But I have no doubt in our ability to meet that challenge.
- Right here in this room, we have the tools, the creativity, and the passion we need to succeed.
- Our government wants to make Alberta the place to be when it comes to...
  - ...creating new knowledge...
  - ...bringing new ideas and technology to the marketplace...

...and solving societal challenges faced by jurisdictions all around the world...

...challenges like water conservation, climate change and a whole host of medical and health challenges.

## **Budget 2011**

- That's why...over the past six years...funding for post-secondary institutions has increased by 42 per cent.

- I'm going to say that again...

...because you need to know what kind of support there is within the Alberta government for the work you do.

- Over the past six years...funding for post-secondary institutions has increased by 42 per cent.

- And that's why Alberta's newest budget continues to identify post-secondary education as a priority...even during these times of fiscal restraint.

- Despite the economic challenges faced...not just by Alberta...but also by jurisdictions around the world this year...

...none of Alberta's post-secondary institutions saw a decrease in funding this year.

- In fact, some institutions even saw modest increases thanks to...

...lights-on funding for recently completed capital projects...

...as well as funding to help create new collaborative degree opportunities...

... and to meet other community learning needs.

- Additional funding is also available to help encourage innovation...

...and to increase access across Campus Alberta.

- This includes funding...

...to help institutions address enrollment pressures,

...and to help them attract and support researchers in priority areas.

- We're also looking into projects that would allow students to transfer more easily between institutions...as well as access services from all institutions.
- There will be issues and technical challenges to deal with.
- But I sincerely believe we need to try.
- We owe it to Alberta students to try.

## Conclusion

- And that's exactly what this conference is all about.
- It's all about coming together to share ideas...to spawn even more innovations.
- Let me tell you this...my ears are wide open to your ideas.
- That's why I'm trying to visit as many post-secondary campuses as I can over the next few months.
- From what I've seen already, I know that each campus is unique to its community and to its student body...even if they offer similar courses.
- It's that uniqueness that fosters the kind of innovation we're looking for.
- I know that seeing them for myself...

...and hearing from the people who learn and work there...

...will help me make better decisions on behalf of Campus Alberta...rural Alberta...and Alberta as a whole.

- So I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can this summer.
- In the meantime, make the most of this conference.

- Go to as many sessions as you can. Make the contacts, meet new people, share your ideas...and let me know what you come up with!
- I think on that note, I'll stop now and invite any questions you may have.
- My thanks again for the opportunity to join you today.

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