

Questions in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Tuesday May 12, 2009.

Knowledge Infrastructure Program Funding

Mr. Rodney:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans learned through this House about a shared postsecondary infrastructure project funding agreement between the federal government and our provincial government. Albertans continue to tell me that every single one of our postsecondary institutions is important and that they would be upset if this funding went to only select and certain institutions. My first question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology. Can the Minister tell us exactly how the money will be distributed amongst Alberta's universities and colleges?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner:

Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The shared funding agreement of almost \$350 million that was announced last week, \$187 million of which was provincial funding, supports high-priority capital maintenance and renewal projects throughout the province. We have a very eloquent structure of a knowledge-based economy and a framework that we're going to be putting forward in front of this House right now. In order to make that happen, we have to ensure that the deferred maintenance across the system is taken care of. Under the federal-provincial program approximately 70 per cent went to universities, 30 per cent went to the colleges. They were selected based on talking to the individual institutions and Campus Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. I often hear from constituents about the need for more student spaces at new facilities, so I hope the minister can please explain why the funding is focused on deferred maintenance rather than on the construction of new institutions.

Mr. Horner:

Well, Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years we've taken a very strategic approach to the construction of new facilities and new spaces in the province. Colleagues may recall discussions last year in this Legislature around the Campus Alberta framework, where we talked about individual access plans from each institution and a projection of the number of spaces that we're going to need and those that we're going to build. But as important to that is ensuring that the facilities that we have today can fill the needs for tomorrow and that the students of today can have an adequate facility to work in and learn in.

Mr. Rodney:

My final question is to the same minister. I've heard the claim that the funding is to reach across Alberta, so to speak. Can the minister please explain how the funding will be distributed throughout the different regions across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I guess one of the things that we could look at is how we develop our strategic priorities around the capital that we put into the postsecondary system in the province. That starts with, as I said, the individual access plans for each of the institutions, coupled with a projection working with other departments within the government, so Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration. We got together and decided the workforce strategies of those departments, then projected out the number of jobs in those various categories that we might need, the vocations that we might be looking at, the apprenticeship training that we might be looking at. We made a determination then in the various locations or campuses around the province, all 28 of them, and said: "Where do we need those spaces? Where do we need deferred maintenance projects to be undertaken? Where do we need value-added into those institutions?" That's how we made those determinations.