

Ric Dolphin's

Insight

into Government

Alberta's independent newsletter on government & politics

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ROUSSEAU REDUX

EDUCATION: IT AIN'T BROKE, BUT LET'S FIX IT ANYWAY.

ALBERTA'S CURRICULUM, HAVING PUSHED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TO ITS HIGHEST LEVELS, IS UNDERGOING A MAJOR RETOOLING ON THE PRETEXT OF PREPARING STUDENTS FOR "THE 21st CENTURY." SOUND FAMILIAR?

The controversial transformation of Alberta's education system, begun by then Minister (now Premier) **Dave Hancock** five years ago, and rapidly proceeding under the tutelage of Minister **Jeff Johnson**, is, for all its boasting of being an innovation "for the 21st century," not a particularly new thing.

In fact, if one chooses, one can trace the child-centred, teacher-as-facilitator precepts of "Inspiring Education" (the name of the current policy) all the way back to the 18th century Enlightenment writings of the Swiss-French Romantic philosopher **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** who believed that every human is born with innate goodness and wisdom that needs only to be "coaxed" out.

In his seminal book on educational philosophy, *Émile*, Rousseau argued that people must be encouraged to reason their way to their own conclusions and not rely on the authority of the teacher. Thus, instead of being taught other people's ideas, the protagonist *Émile* is encouraged to draw his own conclusions from his own experience. In its 21st-century iteration, it's called Discovery Learning.

In the early 20th century, progressive American educator **John Dewey** took up the cudgel, greatly influencing the North American public school system and generations of pedagogical academics until gov'ts, noticing a steady decline in basic numeracy and literacy skills, began applying the brakes in the 1970s and 1980s.

In our province, enlightenment came from the pen of U of A Dean of Education **Walter Worth**, who in 1972, with input from a who's who of Alberta educators of the day, produced *The Worth Commission Report on Educational Planning*, a swingin' pop-art-illustrated, lower-case-headlined tome that called for a paradigm shift in schooling better suited to the rapidly changing age of

POLITICAL PULSE

ENTITLEMENT FILE

ROSER M.O.—FISHING & CASTING ASPERSIONS

The Wildrose Party's strategy in the Legislature between now and the end of the current sitting—expected in early to mid-May—will partly rely on its young FOIP hound **James Johnson** reeling in more Freedom-of-Information files on exorbitant spending by the gov't, especially on executives and consultants, and especially in the health-care area. Said one party insider, "It's a bottomless well of pure gold!"

Another Roser was pleased to report that the FOIP fishery has lately been augmented with files from a growing number of dissatisfied Alberta Health Services workers who, sensing the imminent sinking of the Good Ship Tory, have become whistleblowers in the service of Wildrose, hoping perhaps it will hold them in good stead should **Danielle Smith's** crew steal the flag in the next election (anticipated for early next year, before the new Tory leader's honeymoon has soured).

This week in the house, Wildrose's front benchers went after Health Minister **Fred Horne** for a couple of instances of AHS largesse.

The first involved the awarding of \$250M in untendered consulting contracts by the agency between April 2012 and Sept. 2013, including \$600K for "executive coaching." (The program seemed less than beneficial for fired executives **Chris Eagle** or **Duncan Campbell**, *Insight* Nov. 22.)

The second concerned **Pam Whitnack**, once the head of Lethbridge's Chinook Health Authority, and an ex-nurse who was one of two former CEOs to keep a job when the 9 regional authorities were amalgamated into the single AHS in 2008.

Later, when Whitnack's AHS job as Rural CEO was abolished in 2011, she got an \$852K pension, but was hired the very next day on a \$252,000 sole-sourced contract.

Health critic **Heather Forsyth** (Calgary-Fish Creek) and Smith made much sport from calculating the number of patients that could benefit from such sums—including Alberta's lung cancer patients who, it was revealed last week, face the longest waits for treatment in the country—and they repeatedly asked Horne when he would be getting to the bottom of such egregious extravagances.

Horne, while taking occasional shots at his opponents ("illogical and incomprehensible rhetoric," e.g.), claimed that the bulk of the \$250M consulting contract

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mass media, emerging computers, rapid communication, burgeoning population growth, ethnic diversity, and “an increasingly sophisticated economy and a complex social life” in which “self-actualization” of the individual was becoming a paramount concern.

Wally Worth proposed many things in many areas, including the adoption of distance learning, the integration of television and computers into the classroom, and the creation of the ACCESS learning channel.

But at the core of the report beats a Rousseauvian heart and the call for a more “person centred” approach to teaching, including the creation of an environment in which a child can learn on his own terms with the teacher as a guide, freed from what Wally considered the dehumanizing processes of memorization, rote learning, and grading.

Worth’s ultimate dream was for a “person-centred society” in which “education will centre on developing self-learning habits and skills, problem-solving and decision-making abilities, individuality, self-understanding, and sound-valuing capabilities. It will be designed to foster feelings of safety and trust, and to promote freedom to explore and inquire.” He predicted that schools as we knew them would be replaced by “neighbourhood resource centres” where education would “take place via combined systems of machines and human assistants.”

Yeah, well...

The Lougheed gov’t adopted some of Worth’s

DEWEYISM WAS NOT DEAD AND RETURNED, REANIMATED, WITH SNAPPY MONIKERS LIKE “DISCOVERY LEARNING.”

recommendations, including the discontinuation of province-wide Grade 12 departmental exams in favor of assessments done on a school-by-school basis (Worth called these “super tests.”) But before the decade was out, the universities began to complain about the decline in basic skills in those graduating from high schools despite the vast increase in the numbers achieving “A” grades (produced by the ever more lenient super tests). The standardized exams were eventually reinstated.

Influenced by the backlash against Deweyist nostrums south of the border in the 1980s, “back-to-basics” became a battle cry in Alberta in that decade and the next.

There was a brief reversion to liberalization initiated by the educational bureaucrats during Minister **Nancy Betkowski**’s stint in the late 1980s, and informed by a report entitled “Education program continuity,” which called for less stringent standards in K-6 and individualized lesson plans for each student—a scheme eventually euthanized by Betkowski’s successor **Jim Dinning** in the early 1990s. (Education ministers are slow to act, wary of upsetting the strike-prone ATA, and intimidated by the nests of PhDs that breed and multiply within the Educational bureaucracy.)

By the late ‘80s provincial assessment tests (PATs), never popular with the left, were being administered in Grades 3, 6 and 9. And charter, religious, and private

schools—some of them, like the Cogito academies, putting special emphasis on core subjects taught with traditional methods—came under the public umbrella in the ‘90s as part of an initiative to achieve scholastic excellence.

As a result of these and other Klein-era reforms—pleasing to parents but upsetting to the Alberta Teachers’ Association, academia, and the boffins in Alberta Education’s curriculum department—the province rose to the top of the heap in international tests and drew the attention of other western nations, notably the United Kingdom, which looked to the province for tips on how to improve its own under-performing system.

Deweyism, however, was not dead. Reanimated, it returned sporting fresh new monikers like “Discovery Learning” or “Inquiry Based Learning,” it was once more gaining momentum in the US and lived on in the hopes and dreams of the academics and the curriculum creators within Alberta Ed, waiting for its moment to spring back.

Which began to happen in 2008-09 under Minister Hancock (husband to an Edmonton high school principal). On his watch, Discovery Learning began to be integrated into the mathematics programs. Specifically this meant an end to child-unfriendly chores like learning the times table or being shown the best means of adding double digits. Instead children were encouraged to explore their own means of solving problems.

This resulted in a drop in the Grade 6 math average on PATs from 70% among the last group taught the traditional way, to 56% in the 2012-13 group. Not to worry, though: those provincial exams are being phased out over the next three years, to be replaced with “student-friendly assessments”—a descendant of the super tests done in the wake of the Worth Report.

The steering committee that came up with the *Inspiring Education* report in 2010 was co-chaired by then MLA **Jeff Johnson** (Athabasca-Redwater), previously owner of the largest rural Xerox sales agency in Western Canada.

Accordingly, one of the stated tasks of this “new” approach to education was to instill in students “the entrepreneurial spirit.” But for all its talk of preparing kids for a future in which smart phones, Google, and associated instant informational methods are transforming everything, *Inspiring Education*, like the Worth report 40 years earlier, was merely another uncorking of the Roussevian/Deweyist bubbly that the educational academics and curriculum bureaucrats had been bottling up.

“The model that has dominated the past century of K-12 education has to be transformed if Alberta is to sustain its world-class education system,” wrote Johnson, appointed education minister by Premier **Alison Redford** two years ago, in his preamble to this February’s Education ministry business plan. “This is the vision of *Inspiring Education*. It includes a shift toward education that is more focused on the unique needs, strengths, challenges, and passions

Turn to ‘Inspiring Education’ on pg. 5

LGBT AFFAIRS

DON WE NOW OUR GAY APPAREL

The rejection of a private member's motion urging the gov't to force school boards to impose gay-straight alliances provides an occasion for much politicking

Liberal MLA **Kent Hehr's** (Calgary-Buffalo) attempt to—depending on one's point of view—further the gay agenda or make life easier for bullied LGBT students in Alberta schools failed to pass muster in the Legislature Monday, creating something of a political flutter throughout the week.

Hehr, 44, the quadriplegic lawyer who, interestingly, won a rare Liberal nomination race in 2008 by defeating a gay rights activist, has since become a champion for what is now calling itself the LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer) community.

("Queer" has apparently morphed from being a synonym for homosexual into a catchall word for anyone else outside the societal sexual norm, including those who

haven't made up their minds or those incapable of sexual activity.)

On Monday, decked out in his rainbow tie, Hehr introduced Motion 503 calling for the gov't to introduce legislation forcing all school boards to "develop policies to support students who want to lead and establish gay-straight alliance activities and organizations, using any name that is consistent with the promotion of a positive school environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and respectful for all students regardless of sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity."

In support of the motion, Hehr argued that it was time to take action to counter the "homophobic bullying" and "horrific abuse" that, he insisted, had become a "scourge that is facing our public, private, and charter schools throughout the system."

He pointed to the religious schools in the public system as being most resistant to gay-straight alliances (GSAs), including those in the Catholic system, but he singled

Continued on next page...

DATA bank ...**A BRIEF OUTLINE OF OF 2014-15 SPENDING**

The protracted rubber-stamping process known as Budget Estimates began in March and continues into next week with Legislative committees going over the 2014-15 spending estimates for each ministry and occasionally proposing amendments in preparation for April 16 when the estimates and amendments will be voted on in the House, with the Tory majority expected to pass all of the former and defeat the latter. Here are the basic expenditure estimates for each ministry:

MINISTRY	Operational	2012-13	Change	Capital	2012-13	Change
Aboriginal Relations*	\$205.9M	\$244M	-16%	\$25K	\$13K	+92%
Agriculture & Rural Development	\$632.8M	\$573.3M	+10%	\$28.2M	\$29.7M	-5%
Culture	\$157.5M	\$146.2	+8%	\$48.8M	\$53.6M	-9%
Education	\$4.24B	\$4.08B	+4%	\$666.9M	\$614.1M	+9%
Energy	\$427.4M	\$438.8M	-3%	\$6.3M	\$6.3M	0%
Environment & Sust. Res. Devel.*	\$493.8M	\$580.7M	-14%	\$60.1M	\$235.8M	-75%
Health	\$18.25B	\$17.6B	+4%	\$111.3M	\$87.5M	+27%
Human Services	\$4.1B	\$3.94B	+4%	\$6.0M	\$9.2M	-34%
Infrastructure*	\$551M	\$658M	-16%	\$1.14B	\$697.3M	+63%
Innovation & Advanced Education	\$2.7B	\$2.61B	+3%	\$235.6M	\$70M	+237%
International & Intergov't Affairs	\$39.4M	\$36M	+9%	\$25K	\$8K	+213%
Jobs, Skills, Training & Labour	\$166.8M	\$139.8M	+19%	\$660K	\$1.9M	-65%
Justice & Solicitor General	\$1.25B	\$1.20B	+4%	\$135M	\$59.2M	+128%
Municipal Affairs*	\$423.2M	\$1.94B	-78%	\$1.46B	\$1.37B	+7%
Service Alberta	\$295.5M	\$302.3M	-2%	\$49.4M	\$52.6M	-6%
Tourism Parks & Recreation	\$170.5M	\$157.4M	+8%	\$29.2M	\$20.3M	+43.8%
Transportation	\$512.7M	\$529.7M	-3%	\$1.84B	\$1.54B	+19%
Treasury Board & Finance	\$131.37M	\$131.42M	0%	\$2.9K	\$3.8K	-23%
Executive Council	\$50.7M	\$48.2M	+5%	\$0	\$300K	-100%
Legislative Assembly Offices	\$124.1M	\$113.7M	+9%	\$4M	\$5.4M	-26%

*Significant year-over-year declines in operational or capital spending reflect last year's emergency flood expenditures.

For a fuller picture of departmental estimates go to:

<http://finance.alberta.ca/publications/budget/budget2014/index.html#documents>

out Calgary's Heritage Christian Academy for making its students sign a pledge averring they will not engage in homosexual activity (among other things) on pain of expulsion.

Such restrictions, said Hehr, clearly contravened the *Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms* and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, both of which proscribe discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and which Alberta's *Education Act* and *School Act* supposedly hold to be sacrosanct.

Bullied gays, like Aboriginals, battered women, and abused children, are the mom and apple pie of politically correct discourse these days, and it takes a brave (or foolish) politician to argue against legislation that freely bestows money, rights, or big, warm hugs on this beleaguered nobility.

Education Minister **Jeff Johnson**, to his credit, was not about to be dragged into the honeyed mire. But neither was he about to risk the brickbats that are directed at those who fail to profess the utmost empathy for our LGBT—oh, and Q—sons and daughters.

Everyone in the House clearly remembers how that Wildrose preacher candidates's remarks about homosexuals being consigned to a "lake of fire" (LOF) during the last election spoiled what had seemed a sure shot at gov't. (19% ahead in a pre-LOF Tory poll.)

So the Tories, politically fragile these days, must watch themselves.

Johnson voted against Hehr's motion. But the reason for doing this, he was quick to explain, was not because he did not love and revere GSAs—"fantastic organizations," they were—but because the existing acts already called on school boards to offer warm, welcoming, inclusive, and non-bullying environments for students of all stripes.

Those same laws also gave schools boards the power to determine the approval of student organizations, and Johnson felt it unwise to suddenly start interfering on an *ad hoc* basis with the autonomy of the boards.

Naturally this wasn't good enough for Hehr, his caucus, and, of course, the four NDP MLAs, all of whom voted in favour of the bill.

The Wildrose, having taken a similar position to Johnson's, voted unanimously against it. (Eliciting a Tweet later that afternoon from Liberal **Laurie Blakeman** noting that the Rosers had not departed too far from the LOF.)

Things got less predictable when it came time for the 41 Tories in the house to vote. Their vote seemed to divide roughly along red-blue lines, with the 19 reds including the predicable liberal likes of Bullying Minister **Sandra Jansen** and social worker MLA **Jason Luan**, but also the two likely leadership candidates present for the vote—Jobs Minister **Thomas Lukaszuk** and **Ken Hughes**. (Hughes, inexplicably, resigned cabinet on Monday, but still hadn't declared for the leadership by Friday.)

Both may be looking to sell as many memberships as they can, and it makes no sense to alienate anyone

including gay-straight high-schoolers (14-year olds can vote in leadership elections.)

The voting created fireworks in the Legislature as the NDP and Liberals attacked the Wildrose and the Tories who voted down the motion. These last groups did everything short of wrapping themselves in rainbow flags and singing show tunes to assert their gay-friendly bona fides.

Liberal Leader **Raj Sherman**, always good for an intemperate remark, drew a point of order on Wednesday when he prefaced his question with "On Monday this PC government had a chance to shed its shameful, homophobic legacy by supporting Motion 503..."

(Sherman was later persuaded by Speaker **Gene Zwozdesky** to withdraw the "homophobic" statement.)

In another exchange between Smith and Human Services Minister **Manmeet Bhullar** on the question of whether he should resign his portfolio in light of his leadership considerations, Bhullar referred to the Wildrose as "that Lake of Fire party."

This time a point of order was raised by the Wildrose's resident fiscal attack dog **Rob Anderson** (Airdrie) giving him an opportunity to discourse at length, with uncharacteristic—possibly real—tears and sobs, about how much "hurt and pain" some members of his party, their families and friends who belonged to the LGBT community felt at hearing MLAs referred to as homophobes and bigots.

While on his feet Anderson, a member of and a former missionary with the Mormon Church—which, like the Catholics, considers homosexual acts to be a sin, while counselling love and compassion towards the sinner—took the opportunity to mention that the Wildrose had "unanimously" passed a motion at its last AGM to "defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons..." no matter what their race, colour, gender or "sexual orientation." (One wag at the convention referred to this motion as the "Lake of Fire Extinguisher.")

Accusations and defenses continued through the week, mostly in the media and the Twittersphere, to the point of tedium. If nothing else, **Kent Hehr** had made a splash. For an Alberta Liberal, that's about the best one can hope

People ...

Recent government appointments

- **Donavon Young**, formerly an ADM with Justice, and with a previous background in land treaty negotiations for the gov't, as Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Relations, replacing acting DM **Clay Buchanan**.
- **Andre Courbould**, ex ADM of the Regional Services Division of Transportation, as Dep. Min. of Municipal Affairs. He replaces the retiring **Paul Whittaker**.
- **Lana Loughheed**, a 30-year-plus veteran of gov't and former chief strategy officer with Human Services, as Dep. Min. of Jobs, Skills, Training & Labour, replacing acting DM **Mary Anne Everett**.

Verbatim ...

On Monday in the House, the leaders of each party rose to heap accolades on the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission which wound up its four years of hearings from former Indian residential school students in Edmonton the previous week.

The most affecting presentation, however, came from MLA Pearl Calahasen, 61, (PC-Lesser Slave Lake), the former Aboriginal Affairs minister, whom the Speaker allowed to speak in her capacity as the House's sole native member. The following is an excerpt from her sometimes tearful speech, which drew a standing ovation from all members:

Mr. Speaker, I was a small girl, a tiny girl. When I was born, I was two pounds. When I went to school, I was the smallest girl, and I had to go to residential school. Being small is really not an advantage as much as overweight people think it's an advantage. It was not an advantage. It was not a good time. The nuns were very cruel. They used to pick on me because I was so tiny.

Sorry, Mr. Speaker. Many times I was hit by a ruler—it was always across the back—and I do have scars from that. But I did get through it. It was no fun. I was probably the least of those that were affected by physical abuse. That physical abuse was no fun.

But I had a protector, and that protector was very good. The last time that the nun came to hit me, the protector got up, and she grabbed the ruler and broke it across her knee, and she said, "You'll never hit her again," and hit her in the face with her fist.

I still don't condone any kind of physical activity against people. However, that day many of us children who were abused physically and in whatever way that we were abused were surrounding the girl who was hitting the nun, and we were yelling, "Kill her; kill her; kill her." That's no way for kids to react.

This is just one example, like the example of Theodore*, of the stories that the commission have heard.

Mine was not as bad as some of the others, like my father or my mother. They experienced that physical and sexual behaviour that I believe was so wrong to do to children.

I don't care who you are. I don't care what colour you are. That kind of physical therapy, as they used to call it, didn't help us. It created a lot of problems in our community and in my community.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the commissioners and the work that they have done. I commend them for being so strong, for listening to our stories. They're our stories.

As the onion was peeled from some of the people's souls, you got to the inner core of that individual. The only way that we can heal is by making sure people know and understand the kinds of things we've gone through.

Thank you to the commissioners, thank you to the government of Canada for establishing this commission.

**Theodore Fontaine of Winnipeg testified about his physical and sexual abuse in a residential school and wrote a book about it.*

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of individual learners, and less centred on the traditionally structured education system."

The curriculum is currently and rapidly being rewritten and will be installed in Alberta's K-12 schools over the next three years. The bureaucrat leading the charge is Deputy Minister **Greg Bass**, who early last year was hired away from his job as superintendent of the Rocky View School Division, in Calgary's northern exurbia, which he had been converting to the Discovery Learning model.

The district's panegyric online profile describes a utopian world of happier teachers, more engaged students, fewer dropouts, and a wide acceptance of the new methods by parents. Although in the performance measurement categories a note of caution intrudes in the category of Provincial Achievement Tests: "Rocky View students outperformed their peers in 5 out of 8 tests at the acceptable level, but 0 out of 12 at the excellence level."

Critics of the Discovery learning program include a growing number of parents whose children are coming home frustrated by the lack of teacher guidance, especially in math. Chief among the detractors is Dr. **Nhung Tran-Davies**, a physician from Calmar who became an active opponent as a result of her Grade 3 daughter's difficulties grasping Discovery math.

Championed by columnist **David Staples** in the *Edmonton Journal*, and by Wildrose education critic **Bruce McAllister** (Rocky View-Chestermere) in the Legislature, Tran-Davies has collected more than 12,000 names on a petition from parents with similarly frustrated children calling for an end to Discovery Learning.

As a result of this pressure, Minister Johnson has promised to return the times tables to math programs in September, and has done some dissembling. Three weeks ago he told Staples, "We're not moving to a fuzzy system of completely learner, self-guided education where the teacher is not actually a teacher, but they learn along with the student. I don't know where that crap came from to tell you the truth."

Well, it came from the *Inspiring Education* study that he co-chaired, and from the bureaucrats, including Bass, who run Alberta Education, and are busily installing the curriculum in the schools. Though one doubts any would use the word "fuzzy" to describe their work.

Stuart Wachowicz is a veteran educator who retired as the curriculum head for Edmonton Public School Board in 2009, during its golden era of achievement. He is now a director of the Confucius Institute, an educational partnership between China and the EPSB. Wachowicz says that the Chinese, who adhere to traditional methods and lead the world in math and science scores, will bury us if we don't abandon this latest experiment in Deweyism.

"There's going to be an educational tsunami that blows us away," he says. "We'll be the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and they will be our bosses. Is this really what we want?"

Talk in the Corridors

Skypalaces, slush funds, a Mason zinger...

● Unsurprisingly, the first sitting following the two-week constituency break began on the theme of “entitlement,” with all three opposition parties leading with questions on the topic so instrumental in bringing down Premier **Ali-son Redford**—whose newly assigned backbench seat remained empty all week. They they are now attempting to attach the entitlement “narrative” to the Tory cabinet in toto.

Particular attention was paid to the Premier’s once-planned penthouse condo (a.k.a. “Skypalace”) on top of the Federal Building, as well as to the “secret” Progressive Conservative trust fund from which the party has drawn varying amounts of interest since 1977, and which was used as collateral to secure the \$1.6M the party borrowed during the 2012 election.

Former infrastructure Minister **Wayne Drysdale** and the current one, **Ric McIver**, both claim to have kiboshed the Skypalace—in late 2012 and 2013, respectively. Questioned on which minister actually did the kiboshing, McIver answered, enigmatically, “We both did.”

On the subject of the trust fund—named the “Tapcal Trust”—Premier **Dave Hancock** tried to explain that when 1977 election reform legislation called for the disclosure of such funds, those already existing were grandfathered. And since the Tories were the only party at the time with the money to create such a pot, their fund was the only one to be spared scrutiny.

Hancock, however, said he had asked the PC party to look at “winding it down,” and party president **Jim McCormick** later told the *Calgary Herald* that lawyers were looking at ways in which this might be done, possibly using it to pay off the PC’s \$1.2M debt.

Adhering to the theme, NDP Leader **Brian Mason**, whose comedic delivery becomes ever more practised as he nears retirement, began his routine by asking the Premier, “Will he take steps to eliminate the PC culture of entitlement, starting by admitting that it actually exists?”

Hancock went into a blustery stock spiel about how in the 43-year reign of the Tories people have been flocking to Alberta, as it the best place in the world to live, work, raise a family, etc.

“Other places have resources, other places have opportunity, but Alberta is the place where people have a stable government that’s worked in the best interest of Albertans for all that time...”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker,” deadpanned Mason, pausing briefly, then deadpanning, “North Korea has a stable government, too.”

Much mirth ensued, and *Insight’s* phone registered a text from a Wildrose member that read simply, “Brian Mason is awesome.”

The week ahead ...

Apr. 12—The citizens of Kitimat BC vote in a plebiscite on whether they want a marine oil terminal built in their town. A no vote would pose a serious threat to the future of the Northern Gateway Pipeline, which can’t be built without this tidewater outlet to Asia.

Apr. 13—Many happy returns to **Bridget Pastoor** (PC-Lethbridge-East), Alberta’s oldest sitting MLA, a former nurse elected as a Liberal in 2004 who crossed the floor in Nov. 2011, born 74 years ago in St. Boniface, MB.

Apr. 13-18—Health Minister **Fred Horne** in his capacity as chairman of the Provincial/Territorial Conference of Health Ministers journeys to China to participate with federal counterpart and fellow Edmontonian **Rona Ambrose** in the Canada-China Policy Dialogue, the latest in a series of annual meetings between Chinese and Canadian officials that began in 2007. The delegation will meet the Chinese minister of health and Horne will lead a roundtable on hospital management and give presentations on health systems. Estimated cost of trip for Horne: \$11,800.

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went to computer services necessitated by the amalgamation of the regions. But the Rosers shot back the obvious point that amalgamation had occurred four years before the contracts were let.

As for Ms. Whitnack’s sweet deal, Horne could only bluster about how inappropriate it was for the opposition to question the worth of, and impugn the reputation of a “valued employee.”

Much of the same can be expected in the House next week. The Rosers claim to have a billion-dollar example of AHS overspending—this one involving computers.

Luckily for Horne, he’ll be on a week-long junket to Beijing (see above), leaving the catching of Wildrose flack to some other unfortunate, possibly Premier **Dave Hancock**.

Insight into government

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