

THIRD SESSION - TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

of the

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

DEBATES and PROCEEDINGS

(HANSARD) Published under the authority of The Honourable Dan D'Autremont Speaker

N.S. VOL. 56 NO. 14A MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2013, 13:30

Combating Bullying and Provision of Information

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday the government released its anti-bullying report, and after reading it, we welcome some progress in certain areas. Six months ago the Premier had a difficult time even saying the word gay. And now we have the government release a report that includes some discussion about gay-straight alliances. So that's a good thing.

But the general consensus on this report, it's far too light on details and far too light on action. To the Education minister: why are there so few immediate steps being taken by this government to combat bullying and cyberbullying?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Mr. Speaker, I take the issue of bullying very seriously on this side of the House, both cyberbullying, its impact on our students, and on the facilitation of GSAs [gay-straight alliance] right across Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and we hope the NDP do as well.

I'm in receipt of this letter that I think was sent to you, Mr. Speaker, where the NDP are raising a point of privilege on this particular issue. Mr. Speaker, the facts around this case are interesting. They're saying that because the report was released at a school in Regina, that the privilege of members opposite have been violated in terms of accessing the information even though the critic who was just on his feet knows full well that the minister phoned him the night before, offered him a private briefing, offered him a copy of the document, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition will clarify what kind of an outfit are they running over there, Mr. Speaker, when that offer was made to NDP members on the opposite side and then the next day, the next business day of the House, to play politics, they raise a point of privilege, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, cyberbullying is a major problem in our province, and yet this government simply says it will assess the implications of upcoming federal cyberbullying legislation. Other provinces have taken this issue seriously and have brought in their own cyberbullying legislation. When we raised this issue last November, the former minister of Education said he'd been monitoring other jurisdictions and released public reports on what they found. Mr. Speaker, it's been a full year and yet this government has taken so little action.

To the minister: why, over a year later, has this government done so little to actually address bullying and cyberbullying in this legislature? Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, cyberbullying is something that we should take seriously, more seriously than other types of bullying because it's particularly insidious. It's a type of thing that follows a student home. A student can be cyberbullied while in their bedroom, while in what should be the comfort and security of their own home.

Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Justice has met with his federal counterpart and counterparts from other parts of the country, and we are working with them towards establishing appropriate federal legislation. Mr. Speaker, this is the type of things that falls within the federal criminal purview, and we look forward to seeing how it fits with the processes and procedures that we're following in our province.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise that there are steps that we are taking that will dovetail well with that, and we look forward to working with the federal government to have something that's appropriate and meets the needs of our students well.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the government's report acknowledges that over half the young people that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual seriously consider suicide. Around 37 per cent of young people that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have actually attempted suicide.

And while we welcome the fact that this government finally recognizes the value of gay-straight alliances — or at least the member from Saskatoon Fairview does — we had certainly hoped to see concrete help for establishing GSAs in schools. To the Education minister: what is the government planning to do to actually implement GSAs in our schools?

The Speaker: I recognize the Premier.

Hon. Mr. Wall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We want to ensure that the availability of gay-straight alliances are available in all schools in the province of Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and, you know, we're confident that that's the case.

Mr. Speaker, I misspoke earlier on with respect to my comments on the NDP frankly playing some political games on this very important issue on the question of privilege. Mr. Speaker, my understanding is it wasn't a phone call but rather there was a face-to-face discussion between the Minister of Education and the critic who just spoke on Wednesday of last week, where there was an offer for a full disclosure of what was in the plan, and I think even a meeting with officials so that he and therefore all of his colleagues would have access to it. Mr. Speaker, he knew that, and still this day the Leader of the Opposition authorizes a motion of privilege to play games with the issue, to say, well members over there didn't have information before it hit the public and before it was raised at Arcola School, Mr. Speaker.

What is going on over there? Who is providing leadership? Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue for the province. What we don't need is NDP political games, Mr. Speaker.