

SECOND 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. 55 NO. 47A TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2013, 1:30 p.m.

Combating Discrimination and Bullying

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Halla Scott is here with us in the gallery today. She, like other students, are interested in forming gay-straight alliances in their schools. And the Premier said last week here in question period, and I quote, “. . . these clubs can be formed in schools today in the province of Saskatchewan. I don't think the Government of Saskatchewan would stand in the way of that happening.” But, Mr. Speaker, when we asked if the Sask Party government would simply update the government's website to include information on how to form GSAs [gay-straight alliance], they refused.

To the Minister of Education: why can't the ministry put up information about GSAs on its website so that interested students and teachers have resources about how to form GSAs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member opposite for the question. Mr. Speaker, we take these matters very, very seriously. We believe that all children in our schools, in our school system have a right to a warm, caring, and safe environment to learn in, Mr. Speaker.

Over the course of my career, Mr. Speaker, I've dealt with many, many different kinds of issues, Mr. Speaker — name-calling, colour of hair, the side of the street you live on, the side of the town you live on, Mr. Speaker, racial slurs, clothes, and, Mr. Speaker, sexual orientation. Mr. Speaker, dealing with bullying really comes down to respecting differences.

And, Mr. Speaker, the Government of Saskatchewan will do all that it can to ensure that our children learn about respecting differences. And we will continue to work with the Legislative Secretary, and I don't want to preclude any kind of results from that, as our Premier has already alluded to, Mr. Speaker. And so we will continue to look at that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supporting GSAs is the right thing to do to create safe spaces in our schools. This morning in a radio interview, Halla talked of her struggles to form or start a GSA in her high school. She looked for help in forming one but felt that she didn't have the support.

The school board says forming a GSA is a straightforward process. An official from the school board said students or teachers are to, and I quote, "... approach a principal, and the principal relays it to me, and I basically give the application to our director of education." Mr. Speaker, it sounds as if simply more information is needed by all parties. This is an easy solution and the government can play a lead role today. Mr. Speaker, why can't the Sask Party government do the right thing and put the information about GSAs and how they are formed on the government's website?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Mr. Speaker, the solution to bullying is not simple. It's a community, it's a community issue, Mr. Speaker. There is a great deal of information that needs to be gathered, that needs to be discussed with many different community partners — our young people most importantly, Mr. Speaker.

I know that our Legislative Secretary will be conducting forums throughout the province where she will talk directly with students to find out how they perceive life in their schools and how safe they feel. And through that whole process, Mr. Speaker, again which is a complicated process, we will hopefully come to a Saskatchewan action plan on bullying, Mr. Speaker, that will include GSAs and the many other differences that we need to learn to respect, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Mr. Speaker, students, parents, teachers, school administrators all know, they all know that GSAs are a positive option about creating safe spaces in our schools. But the Sask Party government is being stubborn and is out of touch with today's Saskatchewan. Students need simple, easy-to-understand information about how GSAs can be formed and who they should talk to in their schools to create one today.

Will the government admit they made a mistake last week? Will the minister direct his officials to put helpful information on the government's website for students and teachers interested in forming gay-straight alliances today?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Marchuk: Mr. Speaker, again thank you to the member opposite for the question. This is a serious matter, Mr. Speaker. When I found out about the situation that was reported in the media this morning, I immediately had ministry officials contact the

school division for confirmation. And indeed, they reported that it's not the case, that they would be prepared to . . . In no way, shape, or form would they prohibit the formation of a GSA in their school, Mr. Speaker. And so we trust that and we will continue to work with them.

Mr. Speaker, another part of our student achievement initiative that will help us to gauge the environment in our schools is the Tell Them for Me survey, Mr. Speaker. It's a student perceptual survey that will provide endless data on student perceptions, community perceptions, and teaching perceptions of what goes on in the schools. And hopefully by gathering that data, Mr. Speaker, we'll be able to protect our children, all children, Mr. Speaker, and respect all differences.