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Gay-Straight Alliances

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday Sask Party MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] used some very strange logic while discussing gay-straight alliances or gender sexual alliances. Some of the social media responses about them included the following, and I quote, “Condescending and rude.” “Dismissive attitude.” “Horribly disrespectful to LGBT students and family realities in our province.”

When it comes to GSAs [gay-straight alliance], the Sask Party is bending itself into a pretzel trying to please social conservatives while still pretending they take this seriously, and vulnerable kids are paying the price. Mr. Speaker, can the Education minister please explain the government’s position?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite and myself share something in common. We have a strong belief in the benefit of GSAs and the benefit that they give to gay-straight students. Recently I was at an event at Bethlehem collegiate in Saskatoon. I heard a grade 11 student speak to several hundred classmates, several hundred other students about the benefits that he had experienced as a result of his participation in a GSA.

The fact that he had come forward voluntarily and was able to speak says where our society is now. It talks about where school boards are. It talks about where teachers are, and where our society is right now. The STF [Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation] recently passed a resolution in favour of gay-straight alliances, not in favour of legislating, but in favour of having them, and the support from teachers. And that resolution, Mr. Speaker, was passed unanimously.

We want to give people the credit, the respect that they deserve for going forward and doing that type of thing, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work in that direction, Mr. Speaker. If they know somebody that is not receiving the supports they need, we’d invite

them to tell us so that we can make sure that it happens.

The Speaker: I recognize the member for Saskatoon Centre.

Mr. Forbes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, a Sask Party MLA said over and over again that enshrining within legislation the rights of students to establish GSAs would infringe on the autonomy of school divisions. And the former minister of Education, the member for Regina Douglas Park said, “They are the best ones that are in the best position to make decisions around what is best for their communities, and it’s our intent to allow them to do that.”

To the Education minister: is it the government’s policy that school divisions should be allowed to say no to GSAs?

The Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Mr. Morgan: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from Connie Bailey, president of Saskatchewan School Boards Association, dated April 28th. I will read a portion of that:

We feel it is unnecessary, as school divisions are responding to diverse and changing student needs every day and will continue to do so.

She writes in favour of the autonomy of school boards, and she goes on to say:

Whether it is starting a GSA or any club, boards of education in Saskatchewan respect diversity and are committed to providing students with opportunities to connect within their schools. We know that school divisions in our province are doing a great job in responding to student respect by ensuring they have places that are supportive, safe, and secure for clubs to meet.

Mr. Speaker, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association is in favour of that. We are unable to locate a school division or a school that has been unable or unwilling to provide a GSA when asked. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite raised the issue last week and, Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the members opposite and I said, if you know of specifics, please tell us so that we can deal with it directly. I do not have any specifics from them at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, but if the specifics come, we will deal with them.