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NDP and UCP politics on GSAs and SOGI

BY LETTER TO THE EDITOR ON DECEMBER 30, 2018.

The founding law on Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and student protections against sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) discrimination in Alberta schools is Bill 10. The legislation was passed by the Prentice government (70 PC MLAs) in March 2015. Two months later the NDP became the governing party. Ever since the NDP have tackled the challenges of Bill 10 implementation from a political left standpoint and borne the brunt of related criticisms, including disagreements with Inclusive Education and Bill 24 – Support for GSAs.

The Family Law Act assigns parents the rights: to make decisions about their children's education and religious/spiritual upbringing, including participation in extracurricular school activities; and to consent to their medical/health-related treatments. Prior to Bill 10 legislation the government would not intrude upon these parental rights without due legal process. After Bill 10 passage, all political parties assert children (K-12), as individuals, and in GSA "clubs," know what's in their own sexual development/education best interest, not parents.

What parent actually believes this assertion to be true or safe?

The UCP and NDP are on the same page regarding student autonomy from parents in SOGI self-identification. Both parties support "not outing" LGBTQ students to their parents, and both agree with the Bill 24 ban on parental notice/approval for a child joining a GSA. However, the UCP proposes that teachers be responsible for arbitrary notification of parents in a health emergency arising from secret GSA attendance and/or SOGI self-identity. The NDP rejects this approach.

Any policy premised upon a random teacher picking up the ball in a crisis is dysfunctional and unacceptable for at least seven failings: (1) the ATA 46,000 membership is dead set against this legal responsibility; (2) teachers often complain about class sizes limiting their ability to know students; (3) students move grades (K-12) and in higher grades between many teachers; (4) students switch school levels and may move during a school year (5) teachers are not trained, qualified and placed to make arbitrary and timely medical/psychological judgments on sexuality matters; (6) conflicting views regarding SOGI set one teacher against another; and (7) teachers don't know what is going on in GSAs.

The NDP deserve all criticism thrown their way by disenfranchised parents. Equally, UCP policies satisfy neither parents nor teachers, leave children at risk, and throw social conservatives under the bus. Prior to voting this spring, Albertans must know what specific remedial changes are proposed from all political parties.

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