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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Alberta | 17e | 2e | Débat sur le discours du budget | 30 mars 1973 | M. Louis D. Hyndman | Ministre de l’Éducation | PC |

**Mr. Hyndman:** The parliamentary tradition in the Commonwealth, Mr. Speaker, holds that the Government House Leader speaks very little. I know that has caused a problem on the other side because in the last couple of weeks some gentlemen opposite have felt they didn't talk enough in the Assembly. Certainly we have heard that from the voice of moderation, the hon. Opposition House leader who, I think, before entering the session said he was going to be a voice of moderation. He demonstrated that today insofar as we had a very quiet House until 30 seconds after he arrived. We had a voice but no moderation.

This afternoon I am not going to read over an annual report from the Department of Education. I think we had that exercise in the Assembly before 1971 with question able results. I am not going to go into a recycling of statements or press releases. I am not going to deal with matters of detail which might be covered by the Estimates. However, in accordance with the tradition, I will be brief, I think, and to the point on this warm and sunny Friday afternoon, and deal with essentially three items.

Firstly, to state the government position on the main themes of the report of the Commission on Educational Planning. Secondly, to set forth the highlights of the new Educational Finance Plan in their broadest sense, remembering that that plan over the next three years will distribute about $.75 billion to school districts throughout the province. Thirdly, to set forth some of the elements which as yet have not been stated of the Education Opportunity Fund of some $4.5 million.

However, before doing that, Mr. Speaker, I thought I might to permitted to make some observations concerning the posture of the hon. gentlemen opposite, insofar as over the last two or three weeks in this debate they have been generously heaping remarks in this direction. I think they do feel I have ignored them in not commenting and pointing out the place or position they have been carrying forth.

In this Budget Debate, we are dealing essentially with the budget and whether it should be supported by the House. I think that if you look at the budget -- essentially a balanced document directed basically towards helping people -- if you look at almost every vote of that budget this is the approach that is found there.

Well I see we have heard from the gentleman from Clover Bar there who invariably separates the wheat from the chaff and gives us the chaff.

In any Event, Mr. Speaker, I think that the test of the budget -- the document -- which was read by my colleague the Provincial Treasurer, is whether or not it has successfully stood up to criticism on its substantial parts in terms of the programs suggested, the priorities suggested.

How does it stand up? Well in my view, Mr. Speaker, there is no question that it passes with flying colors. No member of the opposite side has seriously suggested any cuts in major programs. No member of the opposition has suggested seriously that there should be any major change in the priorities set forth in the budget. Because of that, Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps clear to all of us why the opposition seems to have been left with an alternative which they have exploited fully over the last couple of weeks, of in effect dragging very large and very red herrings continuously across the floor of the Legislature. Indeed, if they were all laid end to end they would probably be longer than the Alberta Resources Railway. That is what they have really been left with doing.

Now I wouldn't want to be hard on the opposition though, Mr. Speaker, because I think they have a place to play. Some people have said they are a poor opposition but I would disagree with that. I think they are a good opposition and that they should stay exactly in that position for about 35 years. They are doing a good job -- in opposition.

Well I see the hon. Member for Calgary Mountain View is commenting. You know I didn't think I would be able to get up and say, Mr. Speaker, that the increased price of wine is really the responsibility of the opposition, because one of the basic reasons for that increase, especially in certain wines, is the fact that the grapes went sour, and most of the sour grapes are found right over there.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Opposition House Leader should not only get a volume discount, but several free cases would be in order when we talk about sour grapes.

The word 'opposition' suits them, of course, Mr. Speaker, and I think even if they had invented the word themselves nothing could be better used to describe them, because they are essentially against everything. They are opposed to suggestions. They want to criticize, to tear down, to knock, to nit-pick, and I must say I have been waiting excitedly on four or five occasions for a constructive idea.

Next year I've heard. Occasionally I've seen just a glimmer of a new idea coming and then it disappears like a wet match on a camping trip. That's happened three or four times, but essentially the opposition -- it's a good name -- they're opposed, they want to tear down, they want to criticize, but we've heard no policies.

Now, the Member for Calgary Mountain View is finding this sunny and warm Friday afternoon not to his liking. Certainly he should perhaps consider that maybe he is not entirely in touch with what the people of Alberta think, sitting there in his air-conditioned office in his ivory tower surrounded by his self-appointed experts. And I think that is a record which we have heard from the other side, a repeating record that is heard far too often. A new vocabulary from that side would have indeed been appreciated.

The position of the government on the Choice of Futures. Mr. Speaker, I think that all the hon. members have over the past many months reviewed the board or Commission on Educational Planning, hopefully most of the document itself and certainly the small digest which was sent around the province. Basically the government accepts the position in the report that we should act on a set of goals, principles and ideals so as to influence where possible the future.

Secondly the government recognizes the tentative nature of future forecasting which a fairly large part of the document is. But nevertheless it appreciates the efforts of the commission and finds its forecast valuable as a source of both warning, but also of opportunity.

Thirdly, the government chooses neither the report's second phase industrial society, nor its people centered society. Because while the government has no particular model in mind, we do find that this model construction approach is probably too simplistic as a procedure for setting goals, bearing in mind the fact that we're in a democratic environment where you can only really set forth a particular society if you are in an authoritarian organization where you can set goals and then reach them by controlling all the economy. If we're in a democratic situation where there is local autonomy, we find this goal setting somewhat simplistic, and certainly wouldn't accept either of the two models. Our position would be somewhere between these two alternatives.

Fourthly, the government finds the commission's concepts of life-long recurrent education and its work on aims and objectives being especially important. And we certainly could state that we endorse in principle the four ideals of education set forth in the report with some qualifications of each. We endorse in general the ten principles set forth in the Worth Report, recognizing however, in many instances especially when we're dealing with the principles of efficiency and equity in personalization and quality, it's not always possible to fully implement those principles but the y must be strived for.

The government endorses in principle the six goals of education set forth in the report, but not necessarily to the exclusion of other goals.

Now there are in the Worth Report, the Report of the Commission on Educational Planning, Mr. Speaker, some 400 specific proposals and recommendations. Over the weeks ahead the Minister of Advanced Education and 1 will be tabling in this Legislature and establishing the position of the government on each specific recommendation.

Some of the recommendations will be endorsed in principle; others will be rejected in principle. Some are still being studied: some have been implemented in whole or in part. Some are not in our jurisdiction as they relate to activities of the federal government, local school boards, parents, schools, and teachers. Some we are prepared to implement depending on the results of consultations and assignment of priorities. Some we accept at this time and some we reject at this time.

To complete the remarks I have concerning the Worth Report, I'd simply set forth the government's position en those of the top ten recommendations which members will recall is on page 300 of the report and is a summary of ten urgent and Emergent suggestions. The positions of the Department of Education on those recommendations which are pertinent to that department, of which there are six, are as follows: Recommendation No. 1 the provision of universal opportunity and selective Experience in early education -- implemented in part through the new early childhood services plan.

Recommendation No. 2 -- abolition of Grade 12 departmental examinations -implemented, with new achievement measuring tests being developed. Recommendation No. 5 -- modification in certification requirements for teachers of early and basic education -- implemented in part. Recommendation No. 6 -- reorganization of the Department of Education -implemented in part. Recommendation No. 8 -- modification of the school year -- premature now. Recommendation No. 10 -- preparation of an integrated provincial development plan -- rejected at this time.

In coming weeks, the Minister of Advanced Education and I will be tabling the government's position in respect of each of the other 400 specific recommendations in the report.

Turning secondly to the new educational finance plan, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to get into statistical details before the Assembly. I think that is something properly done in Estimates.

However, I think it is important to note that the plan at the moment is providing provincial support for some 420,000 students, a teaching force of about 22,000 teachers, about 1,500 school trustees in the province, approximately 1,000 schools.

Some of the highlights. Firstly, through the educational tax refund plan, some $52 million new from resource revenues going to the people of Alberta will provide for tax relief on the 30 mill equalized assessment.

One of the advantages to this plan for education but apart from the monies which will go to the property owner and renter in the province: an average of $216 for the average property owner. One of the advantages here for the total educational scene is that this will remove what has been one of the abrasive and worrying aspects of the property tax form that is received by people in Alberta. They receive their property tax form in the mail; they see that the 30 mill education tax is 50 per cent or more of the total taxes. And this has encouraged electors and rate payers all over the province to say, "Well now, that's just too much. We've get to cut back." And this has resulted, I think, in a great deal of backlash against school boards. So by removing this from the concern, from the worry of the average Alberta tax payer, I think we will have a better balanced approach by the public to education financing generally and to school boards.

Secondly, the new educational plan will increase local autonomy to school boards. The plebiscite is gene. The plebiscite was a rigid and very inflexible kind of a meat axe approach to controlling costs of education financing. Certainly there are going to remain controls with regard to school board spending. But instead of the plebiscite control, which almost dealt a fatal blow to the school systems of this province in terms of local autonomy, almost caused permanent damage to our school trustees and teachers, instead of that sort of hard control there will be a soft control, which is the referendum procedure.

Very different -- if the hon. gentleman will read, for example, the method by which school buildings were constructed. The referendum procedure, which allows a school board to pass a by-law and proceed unless the public -- the onus being on the public to suggest a referendum -- unless that is done, you will see that the situation is got to different. The plebiscite was an absolute, total roadblock to the school board. Even if 98 per cent of an entire school electorate came into the tread and said, "Well, we want to go beyond this ceiling," they couldn't do it without a plebiscite.

And what did that mean? I meant that they had to have a plebiscite. They had to have that extra cost. And also the plebiscite got into the question of discussion not of factual issues in education, but emotional issues in education, guide often led to the real issues being submerged.

So admittedly there are still controls on school boards. Those will remain until the quality of the link between electors and their school boards is improved. But the control is now a soft control, rather than a plebiscite.

Other areas, in which local autonomy has been increased, for example, are that the two larger school boards in the province now have almost full autonomy to make decisions with regard to the school buildings and the design of school buildings they want. It used to be that the school buildings board had to approve the size of every closet and virtually everything the Edmonton and Calgary and larger school boards sent to them. We felt there was no need for that. The have adequate planning staff, so in those areas where there are adequate architectural and planning staffs, boards can make those decisions themselves -- a return of power to the school boards.

In addition, local autonomy has been increased by the Early Childhood Services program and the Educational Opportunity Fund, both of which are not prescribed programs by the government with an 85-page book of regulations. Rather they are run under the principle that local communities and parents suggest what they think is best for their area and submit them to the department.

The third highlight of this new educational plan is that it is in more clear and more understandable language for the average layman. I think we would all have to concede that in previous years the appellations of 'a classroom unit', the 'staff support grant' and 'truncation' -- all these, in effect, left the tax-paying public wondering what this finance plan was all about. They became suspicious of it, and so naturally the y would have less inclination to support it, because human nature generally won't be supportive of something it is suspicious about.

So in addition to that, by going to a simple per pupil grant which is clear, simple and understandable, we hope the public can understand it, because it is their $.75 billion, essentially, that is going into the educational system, so they can understand and be partners in educational decision-making.

Program budgeting will assist this as well. For example, there is no way now that we can cost-out in a given school system -- what the elementary portion costs, or what the junior high portion costs, or what the vocational side costs, or what the business education side costs, or what the language side costs.

All we have are figures about the total cost of chalk and the total cost of lights and the total cost of salaries. I think this will enable us, probably not to save vast amounts of money, but to make more intelligent planning decisions in the future.

In addition, I think a clearer understanding of the plan was given to school boards, because the advance information to school boards -- and I realize it still probably wasn't enough for them -- of this new plan was given to them four months sooner than was the case in 1970 when the previous three-year plan came in.

The fourth element of the plan which, I think, should be underlined is that it provides special attention to rural areas and definitely should have the effect of slowing centralization. More money than ever before -- a greater increase than ever before in the monies going to school boards generally, of course, has occurred with the 7.5 per cent increase. Out in addition to that, some $2.4 million will be funneled almost entirely into the rural areas when the per pupil grant formula was introduced.

The previews plan, for example, caused great difficulties in a rural jurisdiction where if there were, say 38 students the government only paid for 26 students, because unless you could get a cluster of 26 students or one and one half clusters, you didn't get paid by the school foundation program. So that will assist the smaller rural boards who had loose ends of students around whom they had to support but for whom they got no provincial money.

Vocational pupils, and there are many in the rural areas who need this assistance, will have special, increased grants of $15 per pupil. We are engaged in the second phase of a program to remove the incentives to centralization which, I think, were built into the previous plan. One of those was the 'classroom unit cluster', which we have abolished and replaced by a 'per pupil'. Another one was the policy on school buildings.

Members probably realize that there is not exactly frenzied school building construction going on in the province at this time and we have, in effect, felt that with enrolment dropping, there is no reason to build schools at the rate they were being built. In fact, in my view, at least four years ago there should have been a slow-down in school building. We are going to be saddled with debenture debt for many more years which we are paying for, of course, right now. But this was an incentive to centralize, because the school board could say, well, the province pays for the building. Let's build a great, big, new, beautiful school. That had to be filled, and that meant smaller communities had to move into the central community. So in our view, there are many cases where smaller rural schools and classrooms can be maintained.

The third incentive to centralization, which we haven't yet been able to do anything about, but we will be looking into, is transportation. I am not at all sure that perhaps in the formula for transportation support which in this province is the most generous in Canada, whether or not that has been providing an incentive to bus because that is an incentive to centralization. We now have an in-depth study going on starting at square one, assessing the bus transportation formula and costs in jurisdictions, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Montana and South Dakota, seeing if we can come up with some kind of system of transportation financing which will be balanced.

I think we should kill the myth that the provincial government can order a stop in centralization. It would, in effect, be the end of local autonomy if we conceded that local elected school boards should have the authority to decide how their children are to be educated in what schools, through what assortments of transportation and what patterns and what grades. If you have the provincial government saying there will be no more centralization you are, in effect, saying that is the end of local autonomy and the end of school board discretion. Anyone who suggests that the provincial government should step in and order a stop to centralization in a particular area is doing a very real disservice to the people in his area.

Certainly there is going to be a problem and a difficult choice to be made to school boards with the dropping population. We haven't seen this since the end of the war. It may mean, though, if we look at it as an opportunity, that we will-be able to concentrate more on quality instead of quantity.

As I have said to school boards, the first step should not be coming to the provincial government in effect saying, you make the decision, we don't want our local autonomy. There are any number of alternatives, for example: if it is a special situation, the rate base could be changed by application to the provincial government; although as I mentioned in the regulations, if the school board applies for extra relief, they also may get less money and have their budgets out. They take a risk, it is just like going to an appeal, if you are sentenced to a certain fine, a certain number of days in goal by a lower court and you appeal, you may have it wiped out or you may have it doubled.

There are many alternatives open to school boards. They should not simply think in terms of whether or not the high school grades should be moved from one centre to another. What about Grade 10 in one place, Grade 11 as a phased operation and Grade 12 the only centralized operation? What about some kind of voluntary centralization?

As I have said to school boards, there is no question they have the power and authority to simply sit down in a board meeting and say this school is closed. But what I expect school boards in this province to do is to use a little public relations emphasis and to talk to the parents and talk to the people in the area when they want to close a school and try to persuade them, bring them into an open house at the nearby school. It is one thing to have local power and authority to close a school, but, in my view, there is a higher obligation of school boards than simply doing it in that way.

The fifth element of the plan is priority for handicapped and disadvantaged children. There has been a sharp increase in support there. Per pupil grants to retarded schools are up 26 per cent, opportunity classes up 50 per cent in two years. The major commitment: a continuing priority of the government.

Another highlight is the increase in the quality of education across the province generally. I think this plan, if it is matched with others, may possibly be the most generous in Canada in terms of the financing available to school boards from the provincial government.

Over three years there will be a total of at least 22.5 per cent in an increase available each year. It may not sound like much except if you base it on a $.25 billion base you can see that it is a large amount of money.

The quality of education has been increased by a new requirement which will be effective in a few years of 4 years of teacher education and more importantly, one full semester or 12, or 14 or 16 weeks of practical training by that teacher in front of a class during the time he or she is at university, not simply putting the teacher through an academic cerebral course for 3 years and then dropping him or her in front of a class.

In addition, the weighting factor for elementary education, for every $1.80 that went into high school it used to be $1.00 for the elementary students. That has been changed. The elementary weighting factor is being moved up over the next three years. It will move from $1.00 to $1.50 ratio and that is in addition to the Educational Opportunity Fund which will be pouring monies into the Grades 1 to 6.

The lowest pupil-teacher ratio in Canada is what we have ascertained is the case in Alberta, of 20.8 to 1, and that is lower than any other jurisdiction in Canada at this time.

It should be remembered though, again, there is a myth that the province sets pupil-teacher ratios in school districts. It does not. These are set by the local school division which can use any mix it wants depending on the nature of the teacher, the nature of the youngsters being taught and the type of course. But that is the overall provincial factor if you divide pupils by the number of teaching personnel.

Perhaps lastly, in terms of the plan, it should be mentioned that there is an element of provincial leadership in the plan. If one wanted to totally decentralize and give all authority and all local jurisdiction to school boards that would be very fine, but it would leave no room for leadership, no room for the provincial government setting the themes or setting directions in education.

This we have to be by the Early Childhood Services plan, the plan to pump $4 million into Grades 1 to 6 for basic quality, increasing in youngsters such things as learning to read better, to spell better, to do arithmetic better, to listen better, to develop these kinds of basic skills which I think we should go back to and which were going back to, to the tune of $4 million over the next three years, each of those years.

In conclusion, the new plan, Mr. Speaker, I think could be characterized certainly as generous, one which not only preserves but increases local autonomy, removes some of the incentives to centralization, helps rural areas and most certainly increases the quality of education in the province.

Mr. Speaker, I will not continue with too many of the other subjects I was going to speak on, bearing in the mind the fact that I think that other members do want to speak. These I will bring up in the Estimates.

I could perhaps say in conclusion that certainly, as I have stated and as you can see, there have been and will be changes in the educational system. But they are not going to be changes on the basis of catching every fad which happens to fly by. And there are hundreds of them in education just about every week from all sorts of jurisdictions. They are going to be changes which will be done after thoughtful consideration. Some changes may be moving back to basic concepts in education that we had some years ago but that is a change. Certainly everything will be done with the widest possible consultation.

The broad aim, I think, is a quality educational system and a fair shake for every student in the province, irrespective of where he or she lives. We have an obligation to find and to develop a new generation, one that is coming along as thoughtful, knowledgeable trustees for the great future that is Alberta's.