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| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Alberta | 19e | 2e | Remarques préliminaires à l’étude des crédits du ministère de l’Éducation | 14 avril 1980 | M. David King | Ministre de l’Éducation | PC |

**Mr. King:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to make some introductory comments. In large measure they will be a restatement of some things I have said to interested individuals and groups outside the House. But given the fact that I have now had the privilege to be minister of this department for 13 months, and in view of the fact that some of these things have not been said for the record in the Legislative Assembly, I would like to restate some previous comments.

The first, of course, is to say that I feel a deep sense of humility in view of the responsibility which the Premier asked me 13 months ago to take on. I want everyone to know and certainly hope they do know that I consider education to be a critically important social task. I consider 'my responsibilities to be significant because I consider the activities in which my department is engaged to be very significant not only for educators, not only for the students, although they are obviously very important in our consideration; but for the whole of the province.

Education is a very important task. The responsibility of the system is to teach, hopefully, students who are willing to learn. But it is much more than a task of instruction; it is much more than a pedagogical activity. Education is a cultural activity. That is why it is important not simply to the students and to the educators but to the community as a whole. It is by the process of education that we teach communication, that we teach knowledge about the tools of our community that we hold to be important, and it is by education that we are involved in a major way in the socialization of our children. For all those reasons education is important to every single member of the community.

Because, that is the case, Mr. Chairman, the educational institution belongs to the community as a whole. It is not the property of the operators. The educational institution does not belong to the administrators and it does not belong to the teachers, although their role in the institution is very, very important. Similarly, education does not belong to the politicians, whether they are trustees or the hon. members of this House. It is important for us all as politicians, local or provincial, to remember that we are the trustees of education, not the proprietors of the system. If the politicians must remember that, so too must the teachers and the administrators.

Mr. Chairman, when considering education, the community should be primarily concerned with ends and not means. When we consider education all of us have been preoccupied with considering the means' of education, and too little attention has been given to the end toward which education is or should be directed. We have fallen into the trap of accepting as primarily important, questions about means which, in my view, are of only secondary importance. It is time to reconsider what we are doing and why we are doing it, and to make that reconsideration in terms of the goals of the community, not simply of the institution. I have said I repeat here, because I believe it that it is time for us to have a discussion in this province, in this community, about what we want to achieve and why we want to achieve it. Toward what end is this activity directed?

Mr. Chairman, that debate cannot be conducted by a small group of people. It cannot be limited to me, to the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, the president of the Alberta School Trustees' Association, a few interested trustees, the president of the Alberta home and school federation, and others. It cannot be limited to a few representatives of the so-called stakeholder groups in the province. The debate I hope we will foster will be accessible to every citizen. It will be ongoing, intensive, extensive; constructive, imaginative, and informed.

I believe this kind of debate has to take place because of the change which faces our community generally and education particularly. Education is implicated in change in two ways. First of all, like everyone else, individually and in our organization we are affected by the changing going on in the community. We sometimes respond well to that change when it faces us; we sometimes respond poorly to that change when it faces us. We are affected by change. Secondly, though, and in a way that is almost unique in the community, education is also blamed for change. When people are assaulted by change they do not understand, when they perceive change occurring in their children that they don't understand or appreciate, in a way that is almost unique in the community education, gets the blame for change. Therefore, we are doubly held to respond to change in the community.

Mr. Chairman, change is going to occur in education arising from three characteristic trends. The first, of course, will be changes in the demography of the province; we're educating fewer children. That trend will change in a year or two, and will change for a relatively short period of time, after which it may or may not suffer another change. But the population of the province is changing, and that's going to have a major impact on education. Technology is changing, and that will have a major impact on education. Social attitudes are changing, and that will have a major impact on education. Demographics, technology, and social attitudes are all imposing change on the system that we must be prepared to respond to.

In order to engage in a debate which will enable us to respond to change, the debate must be structured, focused, and informed. To conduct an informed debate means that we must do many things to extend information to interested citizens and, where we don't save information, to gather it and make it available to interested citizens. I would cite as an example the major study we have launched with respect to educational finance in this province in all its aspects, including I would only note one the financing of transportation.

During the course of these spring sittings of the Legislature, I hope to make some announcements about activity that will lend structure and focus to the debate on education in the province. In the meantime we have taken, and will take, additional steps to ensure that such a debate, as it is conducted, is conducted in an informed way.

Debate itself is not sufficient to our concern, Mr. Chairman; action is required. The system operates even while we talk. Even as the debate is carried on, we have to develop and implement programs and activities within the educational system that will demonstrate to the public our intentions for education in the province. Without describing them, I would just like to list a few for the information of members and, hopefully, to trigger some discussion during the estimates.

A statement on the community school was promised in the throne speech debate and will be forthcoming during the spring sittings of the Legislature. The review of The Teaching Profession Act, designed first to modernize it and, second, to make it consistent with the professions and occupations policy of the provincial government has been announced, is under way, and is involving the major stakeholder groups, particularly the Alberta Teachers Association. As a result of the presentation of the report of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Student Achievement last May, we have received from Dr. Mowat his report on the public response to the recommendations of the MACOSA report.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to pay public tribute to Dr. Mowat on this occasion. I regret very much that at the time I tabled his report last week in the Legislature, I did not take a moment to say something which very much required to be said; that was that Dr. Mowat, in the performance of his duties, did an even-handed and comprehensive job, as I think members who have had a chance to read his report will acknowledge, and by the performance of his job made a substantial contribution toward the development of a policy which will be workable, equitable, and acceptable to the people of the province. I want to thank Dr. Mowat for the work he did on my behalf in that regard.

We are increasing significantly our financial support to the Alberta Federation of Home & School Associations, Mr. Chairman. I hope hon. members will realize that that expresses not only financial support but other indirect and intangible kinds of support that we intend to extend to the federation as representative of parents throughout the province. There is a substantial increase in the amount of money available under the supplementary requisition equalization grant and that, as well as the corporate assessment grant, is meant to reflect our determination to provide fiscal equity to smaller and less wealthy boards throughout the province. There is a significant extension of language services, as well as an extension of the educational exchange program in the budget. I pope they will express to the people of the province our concern for language development opportunities in this province, and the development among our students and our teachers of a greater awareness about the nature of our nation.

Mr. Chairman, I don't believe in the autonomy of school boards. The boards and Alberta Education do not operate independently of each other, or autonomous one from the other. We interact. If I may use a biological term, our relationship is symbiotic. The main thing is that there is a relationship. The Department of Education cannot operate without local school boards, and local school boards cannot and would not want to operate without the Department of Education. What is conducive to understanding in this situation is not to suggest that we should hive off one from the other, not to suggest one is autonomous Of the other. What is conducive to performance, in terms of the relationship that exists between boards and the provincial Department of Education, is to understand what is appropriately done at the local level and what is appropriately done at the provincial level.

What is appropriate, Mr. Chairman is not fixed in stone. Our understanding of the appropriate division of responsibility is going to change from time to time. It is going to change as social and economic circumstances in the province change; it is going to change as attitudes change; and it is going to change with changes in the capacity of the boards on the one hand and the Department of Education on the other.

One thing that will reduce the involvement of the Department of Education or the Minister of Education in the activities of local school boards is going to be the development by local school boards of stated policies, reduced to paper, policies which are fair and equitable in their nature and in their application. Mr. Chairman, if boards have policies, and if they can demonstrate that those policies are fair and equitable and that they have applied them in a fair and equitable way in circumstances, they will not have to be concerned about either the department or the minister looking over their shoulders. Given those conditions, I believe decision-making should be exercised as closely as possible to those who are affected by the decision.

I'd like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, with four points about my stewardship of this department. I believe strongly that what we require now is much more imagination rather than money. What is required is much more good faith rather than defensiveness. What is required is much more concern for the child rather than concern for the system. And what is required is much more control over circumstances rather than circumstances exercising their control over us. During this fiscal year and in future, Mr. Chairman, I hope those four characteristics will be hallmarks of the activity of Alberta Education and, in partnership with boards and teachers, hallmarks of the educational endeavor in this province. Thank you.