|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Province*** | ***Législature*** | ***Session*** | ***Type de discours*** | ***Date du discours*** | ***Locuteur*** | ***Fonction du locuteur*** | ***Parti politique*** |
| Ontario | 31e | 3e | Discours sur l’éducation | 13 novembre 1979 | Bette Stephenson | Minister of Education | Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario |

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the outset, I should apologize for the fact we do not have copies of the statement available for all members of the committee. We shall have those in the not too distant future, but our communications staffs has been actively involved over the weekend in helping with communications in Mississauga and it was not possible to ensure there would be Copies. There will be copies for the critics of the opposition parties.

With the presentation of the estimates for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, I think it might be appropriate for me to refer to the extensive discussions that have attended the presentation of Bill 19, an Act to amalgamate the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Education. I think it should be clearly understood at the outset that I was very pleased at the interest shown in our educational system by so many organizations and individuals during the hearings of the standing administration of justice committee, dealing with Bill 19.

I am aware of the committee's desire to refer the matter to a select committee and of the request to the House leader to be granted permission to prepare a report based on the submissions made by the delegations received. I do not, however, feel such a report would be of value to the committee's deliberations on the matter of amalgamation of the ministries.

Very careful study and analysis of all the briefs and all the records put before the committee have been made by me and by members of my staff. Indeed, I met with many of the groups during the time the justice committee hearings took place. For example, I met with the Ontario Teachers Federation, the Ontario Association of Alternative and Independent Schools, the Ontario Federation of Students, the university faculty associations, public school home and school associations, the Ontario Public School Men Teachers' Federation, the Toronto and Hamilton teachers' colleges staffs, student representatives of several universities, including Lakehead students of McMaster University, George Brown College, Ontario College of Art, University of Toronto, Mohawk College and the Stratford Central Secondary School, to name but a few. It was suggested during the hearings that rather than concentrating efforts on internal reorganization the ministries should be concerned with the problems which our educational system is facing. I can assure you we are attempting to do just that. We are very much aware of and deeply concerned with those problems and are making every conceivable effort to get on with the job. I can't help but feel the contracted length of the deliberations on Bill 19 has served to obstruct our progress in dealing with some of these issues.

The purpose, indeed the objective, of the amalgamation, as I stated in the justice committee in May of this year, is to achieve greater co-ordination across the entire spectrum of education. This objective was evident in data, which was included in the Interface study and the report of the Commission on Declining Enrolment.

I believe, despite the relatively short time since the administrative moves were within the ministries, we have been able to work towards achieving a more consistent and consolidated approach to the problem, which we face.

The delegations, which appeared before the committee and those, which simply filled their submissions, represented all facets, of the educational system and there appeared to be some consistency in the arguments, which were put forward by each element.

The 13 groups of teachers showed concern about what they perceived to be cutbacks in funding and the resultant cutbacks in available resources.

As you are aware, funding to all sectors of education has increased consistently each year, and, as you are also aware, it rests with the individual school boards and/or postsecondary institutions to make decisions regarding the specific allocations. It would, I believe, be totally irresponsible for the government in a period of fiscal constraint to advocate a principle of accelerated spending in any area, including that of education.

The pupil-teacher ratio has consistently declined since 1955, and I am quite aware of the fact pupil-teacher ratio and actual class sizes are not necessarily the same thing. There is, however, no conclusive evidence or research data in this country, which completely supports the contention that a smaller class enables a teacher to provide better learning experiences for students. In fact, one can find at the present time data, which supports the opposite theory.

The teachers groups who met with me and with the justice committee did not appear to be opposed to the principle of amalgamation. Rather, they expressed concern that the issues they face would somehow be lost or buried within the new ministry. I, can only say the structure has been designed to facilitate and to co-ordinate action on all of those issues. In so far as access to the minister is concerned, I can assure you I have met with representatives of various teacher federations and associations on nine separate occasions since the start of the hearings on Bill 19 in May of this year.

It is apparent I can empathize with the issues, which the various parent groups brought to the committee. I can easily understand their concerns for the quality of the education, which their children are receiving, but I believe, as most of them do, the teachers in our schools are providing the children within our province with a high quality of educational program. I cannot, however, support the concept that viable programs can be provided in schools where enrolments have dropped to a level where only a very small number of teachers are called upon to serve in a great variety of roles.

The decision, for example, of the North York Board of Education to close a number of schools is based, as the committee was made aware, on input from all sectors of the community and upon demographic projections which suggest the School population in that area will continue to decline, at least in the foreseeable future. The decision was that of the North York board, not that of the ministry. It was, I believe, based on careful research and consideration of all the relevant data.

Every effort is being made to retain within this province and within that community the concept of community schools, while at the same time offering the best possible program to the students of the province. In some instances parents indicated they were concerned that the single ministry would close sight of the interests of the child in the classroom. I can assure you that neither I, as Minister of Education and as Minister of Colleges and Universities since August of last year, nor any members of my staff have ever lost sight of the importance of providing the very best educational experience to each child within our schools.

Almost half of the delegations, which appeared before the justice committee concerning Bill 19, represented the post-secondary community. Because they felt they represented the smaller constituency in the world of education, they expressed deep concern they would be totally overshadowed by the elementary/secondary community. As you may be aware, the university affairs division has been retained in the restructured ministries. The only alteration has been the assignment to that division of the teacher education branch.

Responsibility for the training of teachers now rests entirely with the faculties of education within the universities. I cannot accept the idea, expressed in particular by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, which the faculties of education cannot deal as effectively with the training of elementary teachers as did the Ontario Teacher Education Colleges. In a number of instances, Mr. Chairman, the faculty from the OTECs have in fact, joined the faculties of education.

As I assured the committee in May, and as I have assured the Council of Ontario Universities, the Ontario Council on University Affairs, and representatives of the individual universities with whom I have met, there is no intention on the part of the government to interfere with the traditional autonomy and the traditional academic freedom of the universities of this province.

Mr. Speaker-Mr. Chairman, I should say; I have a small hang up right at the moment, so you'll forgive me-I was extremely impressed with the articulate and thoughtful presentations made by the representatives of the various organizations of university students. These students are, I believe, a credit to our universities and to the province of Ontario. Their input regarding a variety of issues is most valuable and will be given ongoing consideration by the university affairs division and by the ministry as a whole.

The unfortunate problems which arose last year at this time, in the fall of 1978, in the Ontario Student Awards Program are now well under control. The program is running smoothly at this time and the recommendations, which were made by the students and by others for modifications to the program are being considered. I am aware students in the post-secondary institutions are currently being encouraged to send me postcards concerning changes in tuition fees. I'am aware some 10,000 of these were printed, but I should like you to know we have received fewer than 100 to date. This, I feel, is an indication that the students are relatively satisfied with the current tuition levels and are not concerned any future revisions will have serious effects on their participation in university education.

As the university affairs division has remained virtually unchanged, the college affairs and manpower planning division remains as well. It continues with its responsibilities for the community colleges and for skills training and apprenticeship. An added dimension in this area is the interface with the newly created manpower commission. I am very pleased with the initiatives that are being put forward by this division in the area of skills training. The employer sponsored training program, announced by my predecessor, Dr. Parrott, in June 1978, will be in place in approximately 50 communities by the end of 1980 and will involve some 5,000 new trainees.