

# Education meeting debate goes on without Chudleigh

By STEVE LeBLANC

Special to The Champion

Al Tanner called Bill 160 a "grab for money and power."

Blasting the province's plans to lengthen the school year, dictate class sizes and cut teachers' prep time, the Halton chapter president of the OSSTF (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation) said teachers will indeed strike as a last resort.

"A recent vote showed that 86.6 per cent of the OSSTF (one of five Ontario teachers groups) support strike action," said Mr. Tanner.

His comments came Thursday, during an information meeting at E.C. Drury High School — around the same time John Snobelen got the boot from his education minister's seat.

The two-hour evening session didn't include a well-balanced debate, as Halton North MPP Ted Chudleigh and Parliamentary Assistant for Education Bruce Smith were sitting in the legislature.

Drury's parent council vice-chair Liz Munro said she was only told of their cancellation the previous day — which offered no opportunity to reschedule.

"Mr. Chudleigh picked the date of the meeting himself and ensured us he would be here," she said.

The 300 parents, students and teachers in attendance let out equal portions of laughter and boos when cancellations were announced.

Capitalizing on the lack of government representation, OSSTF vice president Jim McQueen said their absence was indicative of the teachers' inability to gain an effective forum to address their concerns.

For this reason, Mr. McQueen stressed that an illegal walkout may be the only way to safeguard the quality of education.

"We've had no success with the education minister. We don't want to strike, but we may need short-term pain for long-term gain," he said.



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JIM MCQUEEN

While admitting the risk of teachers being fired as a result of a strike, Mr. McQueen said jobs are already at risk through Mr. Snobelen's vision to slash \$1 billion from education.

Milton parent Paul McDougall, who has four children in the education system, criticized union leaders for focusing on themselves rather than the students.

"This is not your crisis, it's their (students) crisis," he stressed. "If things are settled, are you prepared to strike next September if you don't get your way again?"

Mr. McQueen responded "If you have exhausted all your avenues, political protest is a part of democracy."

Pat Kelly of the Milton Ratepayers Association accused teachers and school boards of passing students just to get them out of the system.

He asked, "Are you really going to take a stance on quality education, because I haven't seen it so far."

Taking offence at these comments, Mr. Tanner said he's never heard of any such practices.

"What saddens me is that the media only relays negative views of teachers and not the positive things they do," said local parent Jeanne Robinson, a mother of three.

"We've got this distorted image of teachers as fat cats. It would be nice if we could stop making teachers the flavour of the month."

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