

MPP blasts trustees for keeping sparsely-attended schools open

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Halton public school board trustees are acting irresponsibly in not shutting down sparsely-attended schools, Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh charged.

And a recent report by the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) also blasted the Halton District School Board for its failure to lock the doors of under-attended schools, he added.

"They were quite scathing," said Mr. Chudleigh. "It's frustrating. They won't do the kinds of things that are necessary and should be done."

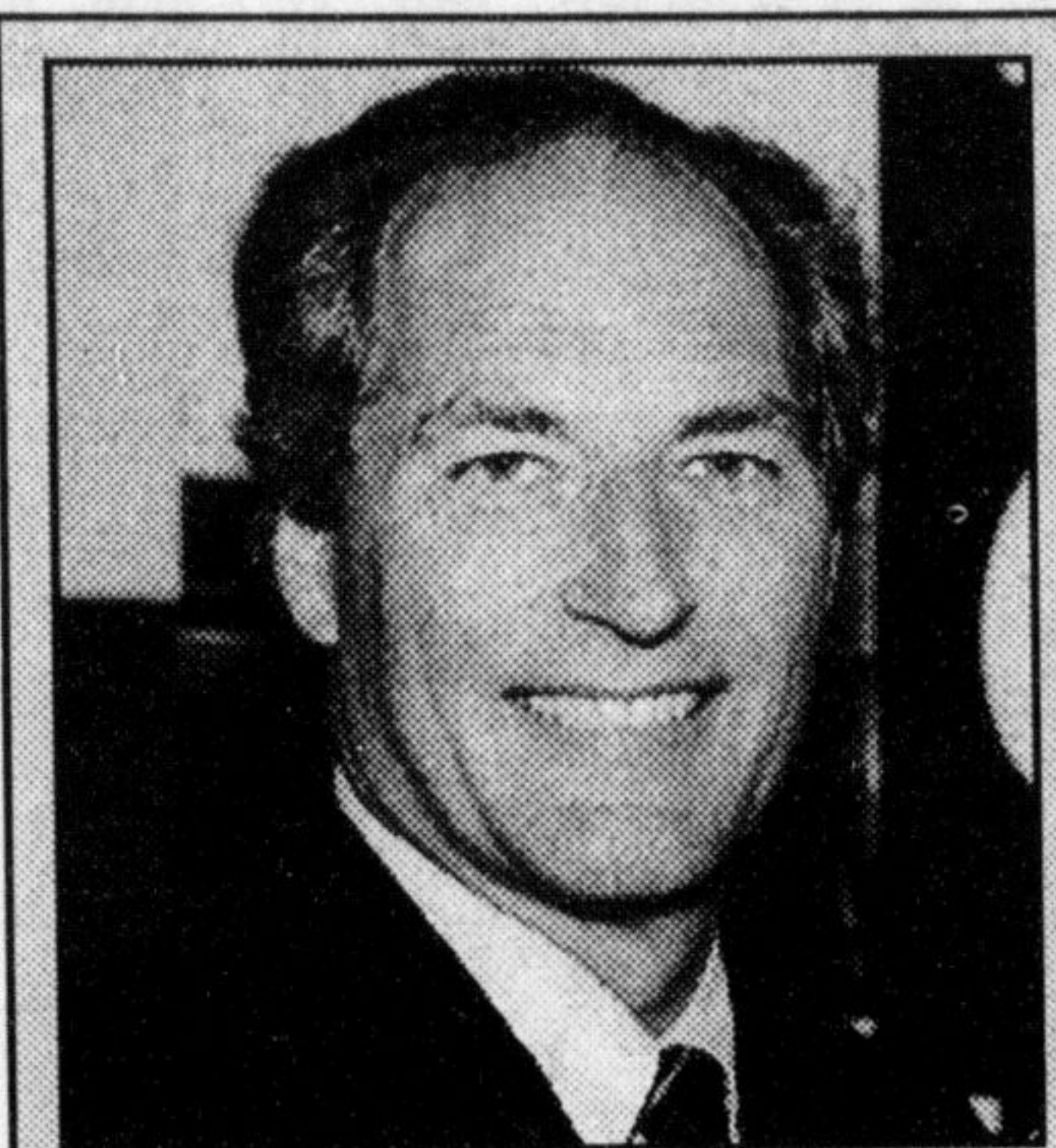
Under provincial regulations, partially empty schools must be closed down before any new schools can be built in high-demand areas.

But in a recent press release, Mr. Chudleigh stated that the EIC's recommendations have "barely registered on the radar screens of school board trustees."

The release also stated that he and affected Halton parents have been "stonewalled" by the board when they attempt to address the issue.

"(Parents) are disgusted with it," said Mr. Chudleigh. "They think the Province should be doing something."

But in calling for action on the matter, he has found an ally in



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local trustee Erica Andrew.

"I'd agree. We are being remiss," she said.

"It's an issue, there's no doubt about it."

The EIC recommendation came as no surprise, Ms Andrew commented.

"They came to Halton and interviewed people and looked at what people had said," she said.

"They, I think, used the word 'paralyzed,' that this was paralyzing our board."

But she denied the charge that trustees were irresponsible.

"It's not as simple as that. We have fulfilled our duty in many, many areas," said Ms Andrew.

"We know this is a problem and we will address it down the line."

The sooner the better, said Mr. Chudleigh, adding that the board is currently spending \$462,000 per year to bus students to far-flung schools.

"They're playing politics with the children's education," he said. "It's disgusting."

The problem, acknowledged Ms Andrew, is grave in parts of Georgetown and Oakville, and will soon be critical in Milton.

She noted that a number schools had once been singled out for closure by the board.

But when it came to a vote, the motion was defeated five to five.

"But remember that five trustees did vote to close schools," said Ms Andrew.

"I was one of them."

The defeated motion led to a temporary freeze on the school closure policy.

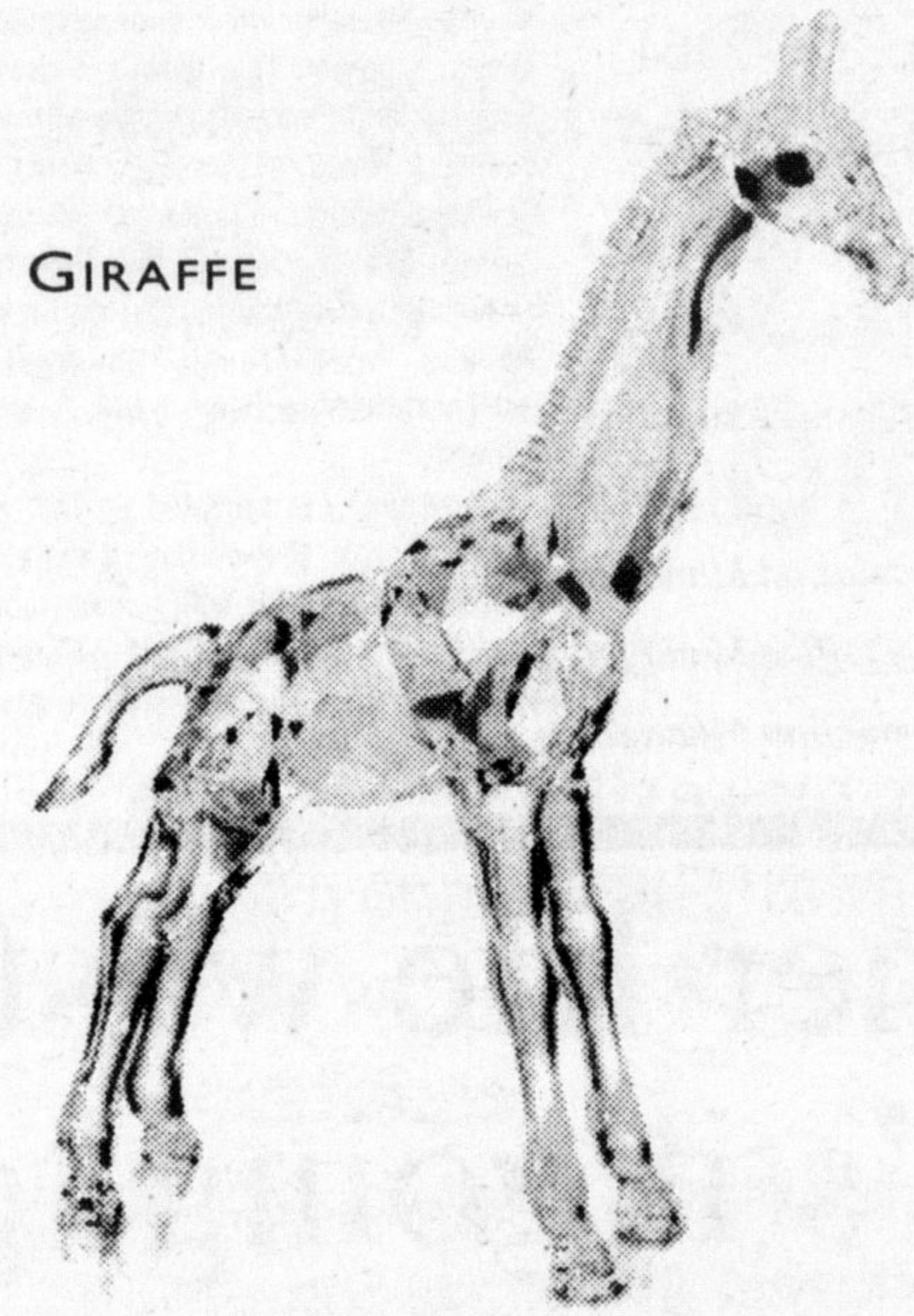
But last Thursday, the board got into gear again by voting to rescind the policy freeze.

And it voted to begin a massive review of all board policies, including school closures.

"The board has to act. I think it's • see GOVERNMENT on page 14


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