

CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

May 12, 1986

Since the 1986 budget was approved on April 14, the actions of this Board have been criticized by municipal councils and a cross-section of citizens. We have been branded with such labels as "irresponsible", "cavalier", "without concern" and operating from a basis which lacks long-range planning.

I would hope that the media will give as much attention and as much prominence to my comments as they have devoted to the misconceptions and misguided statements of our critics. And I would hope, also, that our critics will allow the facts to seep through the uninformed bias that has clouded the issue.

I will address five main points: 1. The misconception that there is a comparison between education and industry; 2. The incorrect charge that the Board did not keep expenditures below the cost of living; 3. The fallacy that this Board of Education or any other Board or municipal council for that matter, can reduce expenditures most of which are already committed; 4. The groundless charge that this Board does not have a long-range plan to govern programs and facilities; 5. And, finally, the requirements that are imposed on Boards of Education by legislation, and the constant demands made by individuals and pressure groups to improve programming at any cost.

Education and Industry

There are absolutely no grounds for comparison between industry and education. We cannot compare the demand for services made on education with the products of industry. When the demand for an industrial product declines or ceases, the inventories become a burden, and management is faced with the decision of laying off workers and even shutting down operations. Demand and supply. There is no such decline in demand for education. There is always a need for a Board of Education to provide that service, declining enrolment notwithstanding. And I will refer further to the closing of schools and the reduction of staff later when I talk about areas of cost-cutting.

The Budget Increase

The Minister of Education has been told in a letter from the Brockville Chamber of Commerce, and I quote: "...an increase of 16.31% over that spent in 1985 indicates to us the Board is not considering the impact of such an increase on any community sector..." This statement is false.

The day after the budget was passed, representatives of several of the 26 municipalities in Leeds

and Grenville attended a meeting in this room to review the budget. That is, those municipalities that took the trouble to accept our invitation. At that time it was explained that the actual increase of the 1986 budget over the 1985 budget is four-point-nine-percent. And that is what the increase is: four-point-nine-percent. This Board started to accumulate a surplus in 1982. Since then, there has been an annual surplus that has been returned to the taxpayers as the law dictates, and as good, sound business practice demands. Last year, the Board used the balance of that surplus by applying \$2.13 million against expenditures to keep the increase to the taxpayers to 4.5% or an increase to the average taxpayer of just \$15.

That meant that when the 1986 budget was passed along to the taxpayers for payment, the average increase in taxes amounts to just under 17%, or an increase to the average taxpayer of some \$65.

The Board did, indeed, maintain the same level of increase in expenditures as did most of the municipalities in these United Counties.

Reduction in Expenditures—The Budget Process

The current Board will have no direct control over the entire budget until we begin our series of meetings to review proposals for the year 1988—two years down the road.

The budget covers the calendar year. Seventy-five percent of the budget is for expenditures that are incurred for the fiscal year that runs from September 1 to August 31. That 75% or some \$45 million of the \$60 million budget, is for salaries and related program expenses for which agreements have already been reached.

Therefore, that 75% of the budget cannot be cut immediately. The current agreements with the teaching staff run until August 31, 1987. The Board will not be in a position to address the questions of teacher salaries and the number of teachers on staff until we open negotiations for the school year beginning September 1987, of which 6/10ths will be covered in the budget for the year 1988.

Long-range Plans

The Board is required by law to submit annually to the Minister of Education a five-year capital forecast. Not one cent may be spent on buildings or major renovations without the approval of the Ministry of Education. In some cases the Ontario Municipal Board and the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal

also must approve a project before a Board receives a grant from the province. More than that, since the inception of this Board in 1969, when the county system was introduced, there has been a special committee established every year to propose for Board consideration and action, a series of Aims and Objectives. These Board Aims and Objectives cover everything from programs to facilities to community involvement. Further, at the time of the approval of the 1986 budget, I established a committee of three trustees and the Director of Education to look at long range planning including implications of costs for programming

and staff needs. That committee has already met as you heard when Trustee Davis reported tonight.

Demands by the Needs of Students, by Pressure Groups, and by the Government

According to the Education Act, a Board of Education shall do certain things, and it may do others. It is, mostly, in the imposed programs that the Board's costs cannot be controlled. For example, the metric system and its accompanying cost was imposed. The need to remain abreast of the computer age is a very real concern and a major cost. The imposition of Bill 82 whereby every child is given the right to an education, has meant an increase in staff even though we have been in a period of declining enrolment now for several years.

In 1980 the total enrolment in Leeds and Grenville was 14,897. By September 1985 this had dropped by 1,331 students to 13,566. While the teaching staff was reduced by 9.1 teachers, the non-teaching staff working in the schools, was increased by 24.3 persons. Of these, 21.6 positions were added because of Bill 82 and the need to increase the complement of paraprofessionals: school aides, resource assistants, child care workers. This is only one area over which the Board has no control. As well, there is a constant demand for more programs such as the extension of French and implementation of French immersion.

Concluding Comments

There has been a demand that the Board review the 1986 budget and cut the 17% increase to the taxpayers to 8.5%. This would mean a reduction of some \$10 million, and this amount would have to be cut from those expenses that are not included in the \$45 million for salaries and related expenses. That is, \$10 million would have to be cut from the remaining \$15 million in 1986.

It is impossible to do that and would, indeed, be irresponsible for this Board to even attempt to effect such cuts. The taxpaying

public would not stand for such naive action...and neither would the Board's critics. For example, the Board could cut \$5 million from next year's budget by exercising its discretionary power and eliminate transportation of all students. The Board is not required to bus students. It may do so. Imagine the impact such drastic and irresponsible action would have across rural Leeds and Grenville.

The Board could cut French programs; or close schools. This could be done by busing children from one school to another, like we tried to do in the Addison-Frankville-New Dublin area. That action, while within the authority of this Board, resulted in costly court action before the rights of the Board were upheld. However, that is not to say that schools will not be closed.

Every year the Board looks at those schools where enrolment has dropped below 60% of recommended capacity. This is the so-called "danger" zone. Each year the Board decides if schools should be closed or left open. That practice has been followed for years as one aspect of long-range planning.

Trustees and the administration are aware of their responsibilities in providing the highest quality of education to which taxpayers are entitled for their children and which they can afford. We have demonstrated this responsible concern in the past. We will do no less in the future. Dorothy Davies, Chairman of the Board

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