



Editorials and Response

What people are saying in the papers?

Editorial by: C. Duhamel

July 13th, 2009 (editorial Winnipeg Free Press)

Facts on taxes

Issie D. Oiring's letter Whack the tax (July 4) contained significant factual errors. First, Alberta does not have "a total of nine school divisions." According to the Alberta Department of Education website, there are 42 public and 18 separate (largely Catholic) school boards in that province. In addition to these school boards, Alberta has five francophone regions, 13 charter schools and dozens of private schools. Edmonton and Calgary are each served by both public and separate boards, so to claim that Calgary "functions efficiently with only one school division" is also inaccurate.

Oiring's contention about the funding of education solely from general revenues in other provinces is also incorrect. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, school boards levy taxes on property to support education; in a majority of the remaining provinces, it is the provincial government that levies property taxes for that same purpose. Looking once again to Alberta, in 2007-2008, 27 per cent of that province's \$5.75 billion education spending was supported by the education property tax, some \$1.55 billion.

CAROLYN DUHAMEL

Manitoba School Boards Association

Editorial by: D. Crabb

August 1st, 2009 (editorial Winnipeg Free Press)

Schools and taxes

Carolyn Duhamel (Facts on taxes, July 13) has had her rant and indicated a number of facts. She also mentioned the fact that is really important. It is governments that levy property taxes in all but Manitoba and Saskatchewan, not the school boards. Duhamel did not mention that a huge amount of that power has been removed in Saskatchewan, and it is that province's goal to reduce it further. That is what many of us, such as Letspayfair.com and the Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners Inc. are trying to get across to Manitobans.

It is only fair when the province assesses taxes based on income and ability to pay. This also puts the responsibility on elected officials, for whom all Manitobans can vote. This is not true at present, as a few property owners pay half the education funding in Manitoba, as well as their portion under general revenue, and cannot vote for school trustees on more than one property.

School boards should worry about education, and governments should be taxing. Let's focus on our real responsibilities, and get the school boards out of politics.

DAVE CRABB

President, MACO Inc. Winnipeg

Editorial by: L. Baker

August 13th, 2009 (editorial Winnipeg Free Press)

Response to: C. Duhamel

Dear Editor:

In response to Carolyn Duhamel's letter Facts on Taxes (Free Press, July 13). In a study published in the Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy (Issue 72, April 17, 2008), it was noted that in Manitoba, locally levied property taxes constitute a substantial proportion of the operating budget for public schooling. Saskatchewan is the only Canadian province with a higher proportion. However, the Saskatchewan government in a news release issued March 18, 2009, announced that the province will cut and cap education property tax rates (mill rates) by setting province-wide tax rates for each of the three major property classes -- residential, agricultural and commercial. This effectively strips the school boards of their right to tax. The overall amount of tax paid by property owners' to fund education in Saskatchewan will be reduced by \$103 million, or 14 per cent, in 2009 compared to the previous year. This represents the largest education property tax cut in a single year in the province's history. Education property taxes will be reduced a further \$53 million in 2010. This leaves Manitoba with the highest locally levied (school board) taxes in Canada. The same study shows that from 1999 (the year the NDP government was elected) to 2006, the education support levy dropped from \$199.7 million to \$121.8 million, or 39 per cent. At the same time the locally levied amount of property taxes increased from \$401.7 million to \$623.9 million or a 55.3 increase, 16.3 per cent more than the education support levy decrease. The study also noted that Manitoba, Quebec, and the Northwest Territories are the only provinces or territories to levy local school board taxes. The study also noted that the operating budget for public schools in Manitoba paid by the provincial government declined from a peak of slightly over 80 per cent in 1981 to less than 60 per cent in 2002-2003. Of those provinces and territories that still levy education property taxes, how do the mill rates compare? Alberta has mill rates varying from 4.04 mills to 5.94 mills for 2008, depending on the type of property. Quebec has a standard mill rate of 3.54 mills, and the Northwest Territories 2.47 mills. How does this compare to Manitoba? The mill rate for my principal residence in Interlake School Division was 21.68 mills. My brother who lives in Cochrane, Alta., paid \$1,700 in education taxes on an

assessed value of \$621,000. In Interlake School Division my education taxes were \$1,571 on an assessed value of \$161,000, or almost four times as much as Alberta. Manitoba has the highest school taxes on properties of all the Canadian provinces. Let's get on with the removal of local school boards' taxation powers and the subsequent reduction of school taxes on properties.

Larry Baker

Stonewall