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| Saskatchewan | 16e | 5e | Discours sur l’éducation (en assemblée) | 5 mars 1971 | Joseph McIsaac | Minister of Education | Saskatchewan Liberal Party |

Mr. Speaker, this Budget we are debating is the fourth one to be brought down by the Provincial Treasurer, the Member for Prince Albert West (Mr. Steuart), and I want to join with others in this House and indeed, the majority of the people in the province, in congratulating him for this Budget.

He has not only balanced this Budget from the viewpoint of dollars and cents, but he has balanced it from the viewpoint of priorities for people.

He has expanded the financial aid to municipalities and to municipal programs which were very ably outlined to my friends opposite last night by my colleague, the Minister from Athabasca (Mr. Guy). We have expansion in direct relief to home owners and to property owners in the form of an increased homeowner grant this year. We have expansion in dollar assistance to all of our health plans and indeed some new ones which were again outlined very ably by my colleague, the Minister of Health (Mr. Grant). And above all, we have expansion in dollar assistance to all facets of education, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think you know that this Government and government spokesmen pointed out on many occasions that we give and have given education top priority.

Now surely the spending priorities given to education in this Budget should make it abundantly clear to the people in the province and indeed to my friends opposite that we continue to maintain that objective. And what is more important, we are backing that claim up with the necessary dollars to give our people the kind of system they want and the kind of system that all of us can be proud of.

In spite of the fact that the past year hasn't been an easy one for this province, this Budget makes provisions for further improvement and enrichment in every area of education. From the University level to the elementary and secondary level, in special education, in adult training, in school financing and school construction. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, Members opposite must agree with this because they haven't been able to criticize the figures in this Budget speech on behalf of spending in education.

I want to discuss in some detail, Mr. Speaker, some of the many worthwhile developments in elementary and secondary education provided for in this Budget, and for reasons of time I won't be able to go into all of them at this time. Continued financial support is contained in the Budget for the construction of comprehensive schools now underway in Melville, Weyburn and Regina. This Government's plan of comprehensive high schools and comprehensive high school programs was launched shortly after we took office, in 1965. Since that time we have a network of 11 comprehensive schools throughout the province. This provides today a modern high school program for something over 10,000 students, and next year close to 2,000 additional students will be served by the completion of those projects to which I referred.

As with any new development, Mr. Speaker, be it in education or industry or elsewhere, there have been some problems, I suppose comparable to some degree to the start up costs and the start up difficulties of any new industry. But these problems are being overcome and are being worked out. Enrolments are going up in the various vocational courses every new school term. These facilities, as everyone is well aware, cost a great deal of money to erect, and they cost a great deal of money, as well, to operate. And I want to tell the Members of the House, that these buildings with their shops and their equipment are being utilized to a greater degree each and every year. And not only by school age students but by people of all ages. Because the lights are on in these schools night after night serving hundreds of adults who are taking Board sponsored courses or Manpower sponsored courses to upgrade their present skills or to learn new skills and hobbies for that matter. Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you that the reasoning behind the development of such schools is more valid today in this country than ever before. The majority of our high school students will be taking their place in society not as radiologists or as chartered accountants but as skilled tradesmen or in the growing retailing and merchandising field or as technicians in a wide variety of service industries and others. The comprehensive schools and their programs represent a workable philosophy in education that meets practical present day needs and gives us programs and facilities to allow for the future. They are schools for students of all interests.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I think the reorganization of the high school curriculum which has been discussed in earlier debates as well as outside of this House and the development of the comprehensive high schools are among the most significant education developments that have taken place in this province in many, many years. The capital vote for the construction of comprehensive high schools is below last year's vote and for the very obvious reason that the program as such is nearing completion. I say, obvious, obvious to almost all except perhaps the Member for Riversdale (Mr. Romanow) who is not in his seat, I am sorry. But as I gathered from his remarks in this debate earlier, he apparently wants us to build schools merely for the sake of building them.

Now I should like to turn for a moment, Mr. Speaker, to the provisions in this Budget for school construction other than comprehensive high schools. It's a well known fact that in recent years rapid rising building costs has brought the entire question of school facilities into sharper focus. The Department together with trustees have been looking at, and utilizing, a wider variety of building materials and approaches and techniques than has up to now been made use of in school facilities in this province. I think of such materials as steel. We have built some excellent small gymnasiums throughout the province for $50,000 to $60,000, built of steel, facilities that are easily moved or converted to other uses.

Changing curriculum patterns and new teaching methods such as team teaching have generated the need for a variety of class room sizes. Ironically enough, the physical facilities in many of our schools today with their numerous boxlike areas of small classrooms frequently tend to hinder the implementation and the development of new teaching methods and indeed more modern and up to date school organizational patterns within the school itself. Our emphasis in the planning of school facilities in Saskatchewan has been to provide the best possible environment for the best practices in education.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget provides for capital assistance to approximately 50 different projects across the province being planned by some 30 different school boards allover Saskatchewan representing a total estimated value of about $7 million. This is an increase in the normal building program actually carried out by boards this past year. Building projects were included in preliminary budgets submitted last fall by school boards, and the great majority of these requests are included in this Budget for grant support. This $9.1 million construction program for schools will not only support a larger program than last year, but it's one more facet and one more aspect of this Government's effort to improve employment opportunities in this province.

In this regard, it might be interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that the last year of the Socialist government they spent approximately $3.5 million in these particular sub-vote grants to support school construction.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure at this time to announce a new policy to provide a substantial increase in the capital grants formula. Under the present formula which we inherited from our friends opposite, Mr. Speaker, and which I might say is one of the very few policies that haven't been revised and expanded and updated under this administration, school boards received as low as 5 to 10 per cent of the cost of the project, and the rest had to be raised locally. The average ran around 20 per cent. Under this Government's new policy, Mr. Speaker, the minimum will be 20 per cent with the average being more like 30 per cent

The actual assistance in each case will be related to the policy will apply as of March. I think, Mr. Speaker, that Members might be interested in a few examples of projects that are proposed for this year by the various school boards of the province:

(a) A gymnasium to the value of $135,000 is planned by the Hudson Bay School Unit to accommodate over 1,000 students, about 440 in high school and almost 600 in elementary. It should be interesting to the former Member for Kelsey who was in this House earlier today and for all the years that he sat in this House when they were the government - that it took this Liberal administration to build schools, to build roads in Hudson Bay and in that whole Kelsey constituency.

(b) A gymnasium for nearly 400 students in the growing potash community of Allan.

(c) A new open area elementary classroom space to replace a dilapidated facility in Blaine Lake.

(d) A new elementary school in the city of Moose Jaw to replace the building here that is well over 50 years old, and again a city, Mr. Speaker, that has been represented in this House by two Members opposite who still sit with us and who did not see fit to renovate those buildings in their time of office.

There are two projects here for the Saskatoon Board of Education which were not included in their preliminary budget because most Members here are aware the chairman up there doesn't believe in preliminary budgets. In fact at times I am not sure he believes in budgets. This Budget here provides for an extension to the Caroline Robbins elementary school and the Alvin Buckwold elementary school in that city to a total value of some thing over one half a million dollars.

A major extension to the Holy Cross High School in Saskatoon to the value of $1 million to accommodate increased enrolments in the system in that city.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, there are very few totally new schools in the program as such because many school boards are adding library accommodation, science labs, home economic labs, industrial arts and open space classrooms, this kind of accommodation. As such, most of the projects are for program extension, renovation and additions to existing facilities.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps in no other area of this entire Budget is there a better illustration of the results of the sensible, practical policies of this Government than in the area of school grants and the support that is going towards school operating costs. The Opposition's financial critic, the Member for Riversdale (Mr. Romanow) in his remarks (still not in his seat) demonstrated his complete lack of knowledge in many fields in the course of his remarks in this debate. But I think nowhere did he show so clearly his illogical, Socialist mathematics as when he attempted to discuss educational finance and educational spending. This Budget provides for over $81 million in operating grants to the schools of the province. This will enable school boards in the province, Mr. Speaker, to accomplish two major objectives. Firstly, to maintain and indeed improve in most cases, a top quality instructional program. Secondly, to do that with no increase in local mill rates.

This achievement is for the second year in a row under this Liberal administration. Mr. Speaker, Department officials are currently engaged in the second annual round of budget review with school boards, and it is precisely because this Government initiated budget reviews coupled with policies of improved staff utilization that we can do this again this year. I had to think, Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the Member for Riversdale (Mr. Romanow) that he was disappointed and that he complained because costs are not continuing to rise in the school system at the rate of $14 million to $15 million a year: He seemed disappointed: Now I could expect that from my friend the Member from Cutkife (Mr. Kwasnica) but I expected the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to show some concern and appreciation for the problems of the taxpayers.

I want to remind my friend, the Deputy Leader, that he had better get out and talk to some of his NDP supporters across the province, to the farmer for whom they have expressed so much concern in this debate, and to the working man for whom they have expressed so much concern here. These people will tell them this, that they are glad to see a Government that is taking steps in looking at where the education dollar is going. School boards have not set their final budgets for 1971 but every indication points to two facts. provincial grants support over 50 per cent of basic costs, and that many Boards, as I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, will not only be able to hold their mill rate but many should be able to lower their mill rate by a mill or two.

I wish to turn now, Mr. Speaker, to this Government's record of achievement in providing extended opportunities for the training of adults in non-university programs. This year, 1970/71 about 8,500 people will have taken a wide variety of training courses at institutes and other various centres across the province. The 1971-72 Budget provides for training opportunities for an additional 1,500 people. In other words, next year we can look forward to a total enrolment, if you like, of approximately 10,000 trainees. And a budget, I might say, to support these programs of over $10 million.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that the House will be interested to compare this figure to the figure of the total trainees accommodated in the last year of my NDP friends opposite when they were the government. Did they have 6,500? No they didn't, they didn't even have 2,500. They had 2,300 students looked after in 1963-64. And I ask my hon. friend, the union Member for Regina North East (Mr. Smishek) who is also out of his seat, to note that figure particularly. 2,300 trainees only a few short years ago - 6 or 7 years ago - by a party that professes not only to be the friend of the working man but one would almost think to listen to them that they invented them.

Where are these expanded opportunities being provided? The institute at Moose Jaw should have an enrolment of something over 2,300, about 600 of these people will be enrolled in two-year technology courses at Moose Jaw. The Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences in Saskatoon should accommodate in 1971-72 something like 3,200 students in a wide range of courses and programs, Mr. Speaker, including one new program this year, chemical technology. The Weyburn Vocational Centre will continue to offer a variety of trade courses, largely supported by Canada Manpower to a number of people estimated about 300. The Regina Vocational Centre will continue to offer courses in occuptional English, academic upgrading, several other courses to approximately 1,000 people. Programs offered in Prince Albert at the vocational centre there will not only be maintained but expanded to a total estimated of about 450 for next year. Canada Manpower programs will also be provided at Broadview, Meadow Lake, Melfort, North Battleford, Yorkton, Estevan, Lloydminster and Swift Current. A total of something over 400 trainees will be accommodated in these various centres in the 1971-72 training year. I want to remind the House too, Mr. Speaker, of the $2 million sub-vote in the Department of Labour Estimates for the major new third institute that is going to get under way here in Regina.

It will be under way in approximately two months' time, not later than May 15th as I mentioned in an earlier debate in this House. I know that the Member for Regina North East (Mr. Smishek) while he has been talking about this project is going to be really disappointed, I suggest, when this actually comes about.

Mr. Speaker, if there has been one area of adult training that has been constantly emphasized by this Government it's in the field of upgrading and occupational training for Indian and Metis citizens. This year we shall accommodate over 1,500 trainees in a wide variety of programs sponsored at a great number of centres from Black Lake and Fond du Lac in the North, as well as in many points in southern Saskatchewan, Fort QU'Appelle, Kamsack, Indian Head and many others. One of the highlights of our efforts in this regard is the Cutbank project opened earlier this year and discussed in this debate by the Member for Arm River (Mr. McIvor).

What about our schools in northern Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker? What about the Northern Areas School Board where there are about 5,000 Indian and Metis students in the various centres across the north half of the province. The Budget this year provides for $1.3 million to rebuild and extend schools across the North. And I think this figure serves as one more illustration of Liberal action and Socialist talking (if indeed another example is needed.) Now I said $1.3 million in the forthcoming year. I should like my hon. friend, my good friend from Prince Albert East-Cumberland (Mr. Berezowsky) to take particular note of this. This compares to a total of $1.2 million in all of their 20 years in office. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, such a shocking record by a government that professes to be the lovers of all things in education, the great lovers, the great friends of the downtrodden and the underprivileged:

Now, Mr. Speaker, just to conclude. What does this Government provide for students because after all that's what the whole enterprise is about, the student? It provides for the handicapped student better opportunities than ever before in this province, including transporation assistance for those students in larger urban centres, Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. It provides for the students in private high schools, Mr. Speaker, an increase in grant support by $25, from $110 to $135. This policy in support of private high schools was initiated by the Premier and this Government a few years ago. This Budget provides new facilities for dozens of schools across the province. It provides dozens of new laboratory programs, new classroom spaces, new school programs, new language programs in schools from one end of the province to the other. It provides for the continuation of a completely free text book policy for grades one to twelve which was initiated last year. Another Liberal first.

For the university student, this Budget provides a $1.5 million item for a bursary program. This, Mr. Speaker, is not all new money, and we never pretended that it was. But, I suggest, Sir, it is a substantial increase over last year. This Budget also provides for the provision of 1,000 or more jobs in the Civil Service for students. It provides an item in the Department of Labour Estimates of $1.5 million to stimulate over 1,000 additional job opportunities for students.

Mr. Speaker, in this respect Liberals believe that the great majority of our students prefer the opportunity to earn their own way. The majority of students do not want handouts. And I am convinced that the combination of these two programs for post secondary students, the bursary plan and the employment program, represents real and tangible assistance to Saskatchewan students.

Because this Budget provides for a continuation of progressive Liberal policies and achievements in education; because it provides for an increasing share of school costs to be borne by the province; because it provides for expansion in training opportunities in university and non-university courses; because it extends provincial library service to thousands more people in rural Saskatchewan; and because it contains so many provisions for increased and improved opportunities for all of our people, Mr. Speaker, in this province, I will obviously be supporting the motion.