

Comment

Fri, August 31, 2007

Ah, sweet hypocrisy

Slushgate, faith-based schools show Liberals practise "do what we say, not what we do" politics

By **CHRISTINA BLIZZARD**



A golden rule says aspiring politicians should be careful to practise what they preach.

If, as Finance Minister Greg Sorbara did yesterday, one is going to slam funding for private religious schools because they are divisive and separate kids from one another, it is useful if you can show yourself as a public school supporter. Sadly, Sorbara cannot. His six kids went to the exclusive Toronto Waldorf school -- not a faith-based school, sure, but not exactly the kind of place where your kids mix and mingle with children from disadvantaged backgrounds. When I asked him about this hypocrisy, Sorbara had this to say:

"We have a system of strong, dedicated religious, private faith-based schools in this province. And that's a healthy thing.

"There is nothing wrong with that. And I strongly believe in individual parents' right to make that choice and to assume the financial burden of that choice.

"What I am saying (is) when you fully fund a system of education based on religion, what you will get at the end of 10 years, what you will get is a public education system that represents the default system. We will see kids from any

number of different religions spending all of their time with people of their own faith and I think defining that as our future is very dangerous."

I pointed out to Sorbara we already have a fully-funded Catholic system. So is it only faiths other than the Catholic one that stick with their own?

Ah, he said, the Catholic board is there because of a "Constitution deal made 140 years ago."

Let me get this right: Rich people like Sorbara can put their kids in posh private schools without dangerously setting them apart from public school kids. And Catholics can put their kids in fully-funded religious schools without the world coming to an end. But low-income people and non-Catholics are -- what? Too stupid? Too poor to put their kids in private religious schools without it being a problem? Sounds very elitist to me.

And in the that-was-then,-this-is-Slushgate, department, take a look at how Health Minister George Smitherman slammed former North York and Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman for donating \$70,000 from a fundraising dinner to community groups while the election campaign was underway in 1997.

In a Toronto Star article, Oct. 17, 1997, Smitherman accused Lastman of attempting to curry favour with community groups -- "many of them ethnic.

"I think many would wonder whether this was vote-buying," Smitherman said, who at the time was Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall's campaign manager.

Lastman raised the money at a union appreciation dinner and had said it wouldn't be used for election purposes, and instead would be donated to worthy causes.

"We think it feeds the cynicism already felt out there about politicians -- that they would do this type of activity in the midst of an election campaign, while turning a blind eye towards how it appears to people," Smitherman said.

It seems the Libs are fast learners when it comes to doling out cash. After all, \$70,000 is small potatoes compared to the \$26 million of unaccountable money that went out the door to a variety of ethnic groups with ties to the Liberal government in Slushgate. Smitherman did not return a call to his office yesterday.

Finally, would you take candy from a politician? Astonished homeowners in the riding of Davenport are waking up to chocolate bars in their mailboxes from long-time Liberal MPP Tony Ruprecht.

Attached is a note on Ruprecht's letterhead praising them for their "beautiful front yard/garden.

A personal 'thank you'

"Thank you for creating something beautiful. Please accept my personal thank-you for beautifying our neighbourhood.

"Your front-yard garden is a delight to see and anyone walking by will appreciate your work and thoughtfulness.

"Please accept my and our communities' (sic) gratitude."

It's signed by Ruprecht. Attached is a Halloween size Coffee Crisp.

Hey, for all that work, I wouldn't settle for anything less than a Godiva truffle.

Ruprecht said constituents are grateful for the chocolate.

"They phone and thank me and say, 'we see this is as an acknowledgement that we are doing something nice, not just for ourselves but for the neighbourhood,' " he said.