

John Ehinger

Bill 45 presentation

My name is John Ehinger, and I'm past president of the Sunrise Teachers' Association and a member of the provincial executive of The Manitoba Teachers' Society. I have been a teacher for 20 years. I live just outside of Beausejour.

I am writing to you today in support of Bill 45, which will create significant improvements in teacher pension COLAs, or cost of living adjustments.

In the last number of years, COLA have fallen short of the actual rate of inflation. If some substantive changes aren't made, it seems that they're expected to continue at these low levels into the future.

I've read the Sale Report that comes from the last series of talks at the task force on teacher pensions. Based on the discussions that those representatives had, Mr. Sale was able to come up with a report that has 8 recommendations on how to best make improvements to the COLA situation for current and future retirees.

Since then, I believe it's accurate to say that the Teachers' Society and the Government have both endorsed the report's recommendations, and that in fact the proposed changes to the legislation contain all 8 of those recommendations. There is disagreement from the Retired Teachers' Association on the matter, however, and in reading their web site it appears that they're taking the position that some of the recommendations are fine, while others are not.

Well, while I think we all basically understand how lobbying works, I'm nonetheless disappointed. Educated people -- and teachers certainly are among those I'd consider well educated -- know full well that when a report containing 8 recommendations is written, it's *not* meant as a menu. It's not a salad bar. And it's not a fair ground, where you can choose which ride you feel like taking that minute or that day.

I quote from page 8 of Mr. Sale's report:

The recommendations that follow should be seen as a package that I believe will materially improve the PAA's capacity, both in the near term and over the longer term.

The recommendations of that report, and the legislation that flows from it, are indeed a package. They are an ensemble. They clearly were intended to provide a real improvement to the COLA issue, but they were just as clearly intended to do so taken as a whole, as a focussed and considered change, and not as a piecemeal, slapdash attempt to put a band-aid on this part or that part of a long-standing problem.

Some of the current financial difficulties of the pension plan arise from improvements that were made to benefits without an accompanying improvement to the contributions that would have supported them. In short, a piecemeal, cherry picking approach to what *should* have been a careful & considered approach to balancing benefits and the contributions needed to pay for them.

I'd ask that we please take a lesson from the past and ensure that these recommendations -- a *package* of ideas that provide a *balanced* approach -- are not picked apart until they're at best ineffective, and at worst something that will make the current problems even worse.

Thank you,

John Ehinger