

EMBARGOED TO MONDAY MAY 14
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Shifting Education Tax Leads Election Debate

As political candidates head into the final days of the provincial election they're going to hear one consistent message – voters across the province want them to spend more time expanding on their plans to get education taxes off the property tax bill.



And to help drive home that message for candidates at the door, the Education Financing Coalition unveiled its own non-political lawn signs today that will pop up across Manitoba in the last week of the election. The black and white signs placed on voters' front lawns simply says "I want school tax off my property. Letspayfair.com."

"Candidates coming to a house with that lawn sign know that they must have a solid answer for how education is funded in the future," said Ian Wishart, Vice President of Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP), and a member of the Coalition that sponsors the letspayfair.com campaign.

"Our surveys have shown that 80 per cent of people want this issue to form part of the election debate," says Wishart. "All three parties have now released their positions, so we as voters can start to ask more detailed questions when the candidate comes to the door like, *What does your platform actually mean to my property tax bill next year, and what will it mean by the time your term in office is over?*" Wishart added.

For Lorne Weiss from the Manitoba Real Estate Association, each of the parties has started to understand this is a province wide concern.

"We're finally seeing some interesting ideas. Doer has promised to use provincial power to prevent further tax hikes by school boards, which we're pleased to see. Gerrard has committed to funding 80 per cent of school operating costs from general revenues - excluding school capital costs. And now McFadyen says he will phase out a substantial percentage over a few years. These are all good starts."

Weiss says he's hearing some strong ideas but the parties still have a long way to go.

"Do any of these ideas remove 100 per cent of education from the property tax bill? No. But it's getting closer to what we know citizens in this province have been asking - fund education from general revenues in a way that's fairer to everyone. None of the political parties are there yet, but they are getting closer. In these last days of the election we'd like to see them move even closer and expand their positions."

Dave Crabb, from the Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners (MACO), says shifting education taxes off cottage property is his group's #1 issue. Some of his members have property tax bills where 75 per cent goes for education, and yet his members are not eligible to vote for their school board members in the cottage ward and cannot send their children to school in the areas where they own cottages.

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"The problem in cottage country is that there are no commercial businesses to help carry the cost of education. But if we paid for education through general revenues it would be much more fair," said Crabb who is busy posting the new letspayfair.com lawn signs on Lake Winnipeg property this week.

The Manitoba Education Financing Coalition, a group of 40 organizations representing 250,000 Manitobans, supports letspayfair.com. In calling on the Province of Manitoba to reduce its reliance on property tax to fund education, the coalition recommends that education be supported through the province's general revenues. That way Manitobans can all pay a fair share to support the education of the next generation.

The letspayfair.com website includes a SEND A LETTER option for citizens who want a convenient way to let their politicians know their concerns. So far over 2,000 Manitobans have used letspayfair.com to SEND A LETTER to their elected officials.

In the last week four new provincial organizations have joined the letspayfair.com campaign and are distributing lawn signs.

They include: The Manitoba Hotel Association
The Manitoba Corn Growers
The Manitoba Cattle Producers
The Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners

The signs were being distributed around the province just hours before the political leaders are expected address education financing and other issues at a election leaders forum at the Franco Manitobain Centre Monday, May 14th at 7 p.m.

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