

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Education And The Election

By Lyla Miklos

XTRA!

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I am a strong believer in the separation of church and state. Faith-based education has been a part of my life since childhood, but I never had any expectation that my government should help fund, support or supervise this education, as Conservative leader John Tory is now proposing. Do I really want my government to regulate the education that takes place in my church, temple, mosque or kingdom hall?

The disconnect between public funding and faith-based schools becomes painfully apparent when we look at the ongoing discord within Ontario Catholic school boards regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer issues. Most Canadians remember the 2002 court case of Marc Hall versus the Durham Catholic School Board. Hall wanted to bring his boyfriend to the prom and the principal refused to grant them entrance. Hall's lawyers argued that the Catholic school board couldn't discriminate against Hall due to his sexual orientation because it was funded by public dollars. The bigger questions that came out of Hall's case remained unresolved because Hall ended his legal battle after gaining an injunction to admit he and his boyfriend to the prom.

The Hall case dramatically demonstrates how murky the waters get when state and church institutions mix together. Which institution's laws have higher authority? If Tory's Conservatives believe they should be able to approve a faith-based school's curriculum what's next? What parts of a faith-based school's curriculum would Tory's government approve or disapprove of?

The Ontario Government's funding of only one faith group's education system was declared discriminatory by the United Nations in 1999. The solution to this quagmire isn't funding even more faith-based schools, but to draw a line in the sand that says that the province will only fund public schools.

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