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Alberta's Bill 10 leaves parents powerless in deciding their child's education

Children should be heard and consulted, but not given authority to make the rules that govern our homes, schools, associations, or communities.

Our laws prohibit minors from purchasing alcohol and tobacco, joining the army, voting and much else.

Most Albertans understand that, while we love and respect our children, we also recognize that they lack the experience and maturity to make adult decisions.

These simple truths were lost on Alberta MLAs earlier this month, when they passed legislation that puts students in charge of what clubs will be permitted in their school.

Bill 10 expressly excludes parents from having a say as to what clubs (if any) should be permitted at the school attended by their children.

All that's needed is for one student to ask the principal for a school club, or for some undefined "activity", and the principal is now legally obligated to say yes.

The principal must then designate a staff member to assist the club or activity.

If the school's staff members disagree with the club or activity, the education minister will appoint an outsider to create and run the club, and/or to organize the activity.

If the club or activity is directly contrary to the mission, philosophy, goals or culture of the school, parents still have no say.

A "request" in Bill 10 is actually a demand that cannot be refused.

These new legal powers conferred on Alberta's children have been justified as necessary for promoting a "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment."

It raises the question: are parents, teachers, and principals not already striving every day to create this kind of learning environment in schools?

And if they aren't, how will putting students in charge of clubs and "activities", while deliberately excluding parental input and involvement, create better schools?

Some have argued the purpose of Bill 10 is to help combat bullying in schools.

Though bullying is a problem that targets children by class, race, weight, appearance, sexual orientation, geography and intelligence, nobody has ever seriously suggested rich-poor, fat-thin, ugly-attractive or stupid-smart alliances as a solution to bullying, because such clubs would not address the root causes of bullying.

Those root causes include the failure of some parents to model kindness and respect in their homes, and rotten cultural norms that exalt physical attractiveness and sex-appeal as being far more important than acquiring good character, demonstrated by virtues like humility, wisdom, unselfishness, and self-control.

Pretexts being false excuses, bullying even occurs without any identifiable cause or basis, because it is driven by whim; the victim is disliked and mistreated for no apparent reason.

A school club that juxtaposes two opposites in its title is not likely to cause parents to do a better job of teaching their children compassion,

generosity, and other aspects of good character. Nevertheless, some parents may want to send their children to a school that hosts a club named after an alliance of opposites. They should be able to do so.

After all, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

This fundamental principle of our free society also exists in Canada's constitution, which expressly recognizes the right of parents to impart their values to their children through religious schools, regardless of how popular or unpopular that religion's teachings may be.

The Universal Declaration was drafted and signed in response to governments using their coercive powers to indoctrinate children into the state's ideology, contrary to parents' wishes.

But even a democracy like Canada protects parental rights in education, as was affirmed again last week by the Supreme Court of Canada in its decision in *Loyola v. Quebec*.

Aside from the sheer foolishness of putting children in charge of what clubs are permitted in schools, Bill 10 is a gross violation of the principle that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

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