

CKNW Talk Show Idol – Sunday, February 25

David Russell on School Fees, with Guest BCSTA President Penny Tees

BCSTA President Penny Tees was featured on a CKNW segment with “Talk Show Host Idol” hopeful David Russell. Russell’s editorial topic was school fees. Here is an excerpt:

Russell: Victoria school trustee John Young may have taught international trade but he seems to be lacking in some economic fundamentals – at least as they apply to education.

Mr. Young, having already caused the Victoria School District to halt charging fees in a previous suit, has now said that the Liberal government, planning to change the Act to make that legal again, he’s going to take them to court again. He says fees stopped being charged in Victoria years ago and it didn’t change a single thing, which would be laughable if it weren’t so insulting. Using his logic if programs that charged fees in the past can continue unabated, schools must have been charging fees unnecessarily. What did he think schools were doing with that money? Do he think they were sitting in back rooms, chomping cigars, visors askew while they divided up the spoils they had taken from their unwitting charges?

Schools charge fees for elective courses because they needed the money. Simple as that and things can’t go the same way if they don’t have the money to make that happen. Sorry Mr. Young, for a change, the government made the right decision on this one. They need to have fees on elective courses.

Schools can’t be all things to all people all the time. I would like to hear what you have to say about that, I would like to hear your perspective ... before that, Penny Tees, president of the British Columbia School Trustees Association joins us. Penny Tees thanks for joining.

Now I gather from your backgrounder that the BCSTA is not necessarily in agreement with Mr. Young?

Tees: Well, what school boards over the years have done is to build up many enhanced programs for students. Well beyond the core education offerings, school boards have provided many other options for students that make their education more exciting, more relevant – and here I’m talking about your band programs, programs of choice that have emerged in the last few years. It might be hockey schools, fine arts kind of academies or outdoor education programs. Schools have also moved into sort of trades training kinds of programs with hairdressing, carpentry, chef options. Many different programs are now available.

Russell: Mr. Young would tell us that those programs should be funded by the government regardless of whether or not there is a fee charge.

Tees: What we heard in the Throne Speech – and school boards did make a plea to government to be able to continue to offer those kinds of enhanced programs – we heard that government intends to respond with legislation that allows certain restricted fees to be recovered from students. We are pleased with that judgment – with that legislative change that will be coming – because we know these programs are important to communities and important to students.

Russell: Now is your organization hearing from people that so far this year from school districts and school boards that have had difficulties with the fees no longer being available?

Tees: This year has been a bit of a transition year. Many of the fees had already been collected before the judgment came down. So schools and school boards have made the adjustments necessary to meet the Supreme Court ruling requirements, but in planning for next year it was clear that there would be very significant impact if there was not legislative change to enable some fees to be charged and lets be really clear hear that school boards do support

unequivocally free public education of our core programs for every student in BC. We are talking here about cost recovery of non-instructional costs for your enhanced and more exciting programs for students.

Russell: Thank you very much Mrs. Tees for joining us, I know you are in town for meetings this weekend. I appreciate your time.

Tees: Thank you.

Russell: Well we'd like to hear what you have to say about this.

Note: there were three callers in the 15 minute segment. Highlights:

Caller 1: "School boards are caught in the middle in this funding thing and I think people have to be clear it does roll back to the provincial government. It's the one who doesn't want to do its fare share of the balance of the need of financial funding for schools."

Caller 2: "I have a concern that it's going to be based to school based parents committees of some sort and the inequalities between the districts is a great concern of mine. I think the fee should be approved by school boards and not by parents who have a vested interest."

Caller 3: "What gets to me how my fundraised money is spent ... one school will put all their money in field trips and the other will put it into special programs ... it's frustrating because you don't know what to expect if you change schools your schools education is completely changed."

To listen to the full broadcast, visit CKNW's audio vault. Access is free but does require the user to sign up and create a password. Select Sunday, February 25, 1 p.m. The program begins following the news at six minutes past the hour. The segment begins at 10 minutes past the hour.

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