

The Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers

Friday, October 29, 2010

The Victoria Inn, Winnipeg



Background

The Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers was initiated in response to feedback from the “Premier’s Youth Round Table” at Rural Forum 2000. At the Round Table, Manitoba youth indicated that they would like an opportunity to speak directly with provincial and community leaders. Since 2001, eleven *Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meetings with Ministers* have provided Manitoba youth with the opportunity to engage in discussions with provincial Cabinet Ministers. The longevity and history of this event reflects the importance of giving youth the opportunity to share their voices and ask questions about things that are happening in Manitoba that are both relative to their lives today and pathways to the future.

Introduction

On October 29, 2010 approximately 90 youth from across Manitoba attended *The Manitoba Youth Town Hall Meeting with Ministers* that took place in Winnipeg at The Victoria Inn.

The day began by receiving welcoming remarks from Minister Chomiak, Minister of Innovation, Energy and Mines on behalf of Minister Rondeau who was unable to attend the event. Following Minister Chomiak’s greetings, a keynote address was given by Rob Dyer, founder of Skate 4 Cancer. Rob is twenty-two years old

and has committed much of his time to raising awareness and funds for cancer. Mr. Dyer's presentation was incredibly inspiring and spoke to hope, dreams, desire and success on all levels.

Subsequent to the morning speeches, students gathered into three groups for their brainstorming session. The objective of the morning session was to have youth attendees discuss and generate questions that they wished to pose to the attending Cabinet Ministers in the afternoon. The MB4Youth Advisory Council members guided the groups through their discussions and recorded the questions that would be presented to the Ministers in the afternoon.

After lunch, conference participants had the pleasure of hearing from Premier Selinger. The Premier extended a welcome to all conference delegates and thanked the attendees for being active and engaged citizens in their communities and schools.

Youth Sessions with Ministers

In the afternoon the students were joined by Minister Nancy Allan, Minister Jennifer Howard and Minister Flor Marcelino. Each of the Ministers was pleased to be in attendance and they valued their time and discussions with the youth delegates. The Ministers rotated throughout each of the three groups and

answered some of the key questions that students had generated in their morning session.

Manitoba Education

Minister Nancy Allan discussed various issues and topics with the youth. One of the key questions focused on physical education as a mandatory subject.

Minister Allan explained the importance of physical activity and the benefits it has in terms of increasing academic achievement and promoting active lifestyles.

Furthermore, Minister Allan explained that the Physical Education/Health curriculum provides schools with flexibility in determining the best delivery model depending on local resources.

Minister Allan also addressed questions regarding programming that deals with bullying. The Province works closely with schools, communities and families on issues related to safety and violence prevention. The implementation of the Safe Schools Charter legislation requires that every school develop a code of conduct that requires pupils to comply with the rules of the school and conduct themselves in a respectful manner. The code of conduct must also include a statement that it is unacceptable to bully or abuse another person.

Another topic that was brought to the Minister's attention was the importance of career development courses. Minister Allan discussed the necessity of

supporting students in exploring various career paths and noted that there are incredible opportunities for youth here in Manitoba.

Minister Allan shared her insight on technology in the schools. The Province values the progression and advancement of technology and believes that it should be incorporated across the curriculum. Manitoba Education is also working with MTS to implement broadband services throughout all schools in Manitoba.

Labour and Immigration

Minister Howard spoke with the youth about a variety of issues and topics. Youth were interested to know about the Province's approach to promoting jobs for individuals with disabilities. Minister Howard noted that Manitoba offers tax credits to employers to encourage and accommodate those with disabilities. Furthermore, Minister Howard told the youth that the Province is working hard to increase the percentage of people with disabilities working and entering our workforce; she added that it is important to structure the work environment to accommodate a variety of workers.

Another question that was brought to Minister Howard's attention regarded the factors that contribute to the increase of minimum wage. Firstly, the Minister addressed this inquiry by explaining that there has been a gradual increase in

minimum wage. Since 2007 the minimum wage has increased from \$8.00 to \$9.50 per hour. At the current time, the unemployment rate in Manitoba is low which reflects employers' capacity to pay their employees minimum wage. Minister Howard also explained some primary questions that need to be considered when discussing the increase of minimum wage. *Can people who make minimum wage afford to buy what they need? Are businesses able to pay minimum wage?* The Minister concluded by stating that Manitoba is in fairly good standing, in comparison to other provinces, when it comes to the provision of minimum wage.

Many of the youth had questions relating to immigrants and their transition to Canada and into the workforce. Minister Howard explained that Manitoba has a high immigration rate and the Province has established programming to assist newcomers. The programming offered is often tailored to the needs of immigrants and supports them in their transition to Manitoba. Entry programs provide information on the laws of Canada and help newcomers learn job skills and other languages such as English and French.

Minister Howard recognized the difficulty that many immigrants have regarding the training and credentials they have earned in their home countries. Many immigrants have skilled professions, but these qualifications are not always recognized here in Canada. The Minister explained that it is necessary to implement fair practices to help newcomers receive work. Minister Howard

suggested that exploring alternative ways, in lieu of standardized tests, to assess the knowledge and skills of immigrants looking to enter a particular trade.

There were also questions regarding workplace safety and health. Minister Howard's initial response acknowledged the message that everyone in Manitoba has the right to safe work. Creating a safe workplace relies on educating employers and ensuring they are providing their employees with a safe work environment. The Province funds programs to educate youth on workplace health and safety; one example is 'Safe Workers of Tomorrow'.

Culture, Heritage and Tourism

Minister Flor Marcelino described the variety of programs, festivals and cultural events that Manitoba hosts each year throughout the province. She also explained that the province invests a significant amount of funding to support organizations that provide programs and events to youth, including Canadian newcomers and Aboriginal youth.

Responding to questions about attracting tourists to our province, the Minister noted that Manitoba's lakes and rivers and the wilderness areas in the north and on the east side of the province, are being developed as major attractions. The government is working with Travel Manitoba and the industry to increase visits by international tourists who want to learn more about Aboriginal culture and other cultures, and experience the beauty of nature in Manitoba.

Minister Marcelino emphasized that Manitoba has a vibrant and successful film production industry. The Province has programs that support and encourage organizations to produce their films in Manitoba. Many made in Manitoba films have received international recognition and awards. Minister Marcelino also pointed out that there are many highly skilled people employed in the Manitoba film industry which offers significant career opportunities for young people on either side of the camera.

Minister Marcelino indicated that through the provincial arts budget Manitoba is one of the highest per capita funders in the country. As a province we have remained committed to supporting the arts both in the community and professionally. One example was the funding of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet allowing them to tour and showcase their talents. Results show that Manitoba stands out as a place where culture, arts and diversity are valued and embraced. In terms of supporting different art groups in inner city Winnipeg, the Province provides funding to not for profit, youth servicing organizations such as Art City and the Graffiti Gallery. Minister Marcelino stated that these organizations have positively changed many young lives and provided a haven for them to demonstrate their talents.

Conclusion

The day concluded by gathering the attending youth and Ministers together for a photo. The students were pleased with the time they were able to spend meeting one another and speaking with attending Ministers.