

HILTON-O'BRIEN: When it comes to parental rights, there are no other stakeholders

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The biggest social movement of the decade is parental rights in education, and the United Conservative Party's 2023 convention was a prime example. With nearly 4,000 members in attendance, it was the largest political meeting in Alberta's history and an enormous part of it focused on parental rights. Out of 30 policies that were brought to the floor of the convention, six — 20% of the total — involved parental rights.

That makes it serious business for UCP leader Danielle Smith.

It's no small thing to bring a motion to the floor of the UCP's annual convention. Literally hundreds of policies were proposed: members were surveyed extensively to find the thirty most important of them. Policies came to that floor only because a large number of people from different areas of the province supported them.

Most importantly, the policies didn't come from large organizations or paid staff. Some parties have resolutions prepared by professional activists or union lawyers. The UCP resolutions, by contrast, came from Jill in Calgary and Bob in Lac la Biche. These aren't lawyers or professional activists: they are just parents. And they

had to get support from party members who wouldn't go to the convention — which means their support is far, far larger than just those at the convention. As a measure of public opinion, UCP policy proposals are in a category of their own.

To confirm this, one need only observe what happened when Smith said that "parental rights and choice in your child's education is and will continue to be a fundamental core principle and we will never apologize for this." The applause was deafening — the biggest ovation she received in the entire speech.

The surprise came in her press conference after the speech. A reporter asked whether she held Kenney's view, that she "[held the pen](#)" on policy regardless of the views of the members. She didn't affirm Kenney's view — but instead stated that she had to "balance" the claims of parents with those of "other stakeholders."

We're not impressed by this.

While Smith was giving her press conference, UCP members were passing parental rights policies, including a motion that schools could not change the pronouns used for children without the parent's consent. Such measures are opposed by self-proclaimed

advocates for Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) groups, as well as the Saskatchewan Children's Advocate. These "other stakeholders" insist that [parents should not be informed](#) of such changes, on the grounds that some might abuse their children.

Let's cut to the heart of these claims by "other stakeholders." At its core, it's an argument that children have a right to privacy *from their parents*. Most parents hold that this is invalid, and those who claim to advocate for SGMs claim that parents are the radicals. Yet parents aren't just right — they are *absolutely* right. It's a technical argument from philosophy, so hang onto your hat.

Rights don't exist in a vacuum. Every rights claim is a claim against someone else — generally, a claim by individuals against the state. Children, however, are minors: a competent person must exert their rights on their behalf. In general — and this is what documents such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights foresee — parents must exert the rights of their children against the State.

The SGM advocates are arguing the opposite. They are claiming that the *State*, [with teachers as its agents](#), should exert the child's rights against the parents.

The SGM advocates' argument is simply invalid. The state only gains power to exercise the rights of children against the state in very special circumstances. Abuse or terrible neglect must be proved — in a court of law — and the bar to prove it is very high. The parents must *know* that they are being deprived of their power, and have the chance to defend themselves.

The SGM advocates are trying to take control of the children's rights without due process — without even telling parents that they are doing so. This isn't just a perversion of the idea of human rights: it is a straightforward violation of them.

Even if they didn't make the technical argument, that is what the members of the United Conservative Party understand. That's why the parental rights motions generally had such overwhelming support. And it's why parental rights are the

biggest social movement of the century. If the premier chooses to stand against them, she does so at her peril.

Our message to the premier is therefore simple: when she is trying to balance the rights of parents against other stakeholders, *there are no other legitimate stakeholders*.

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