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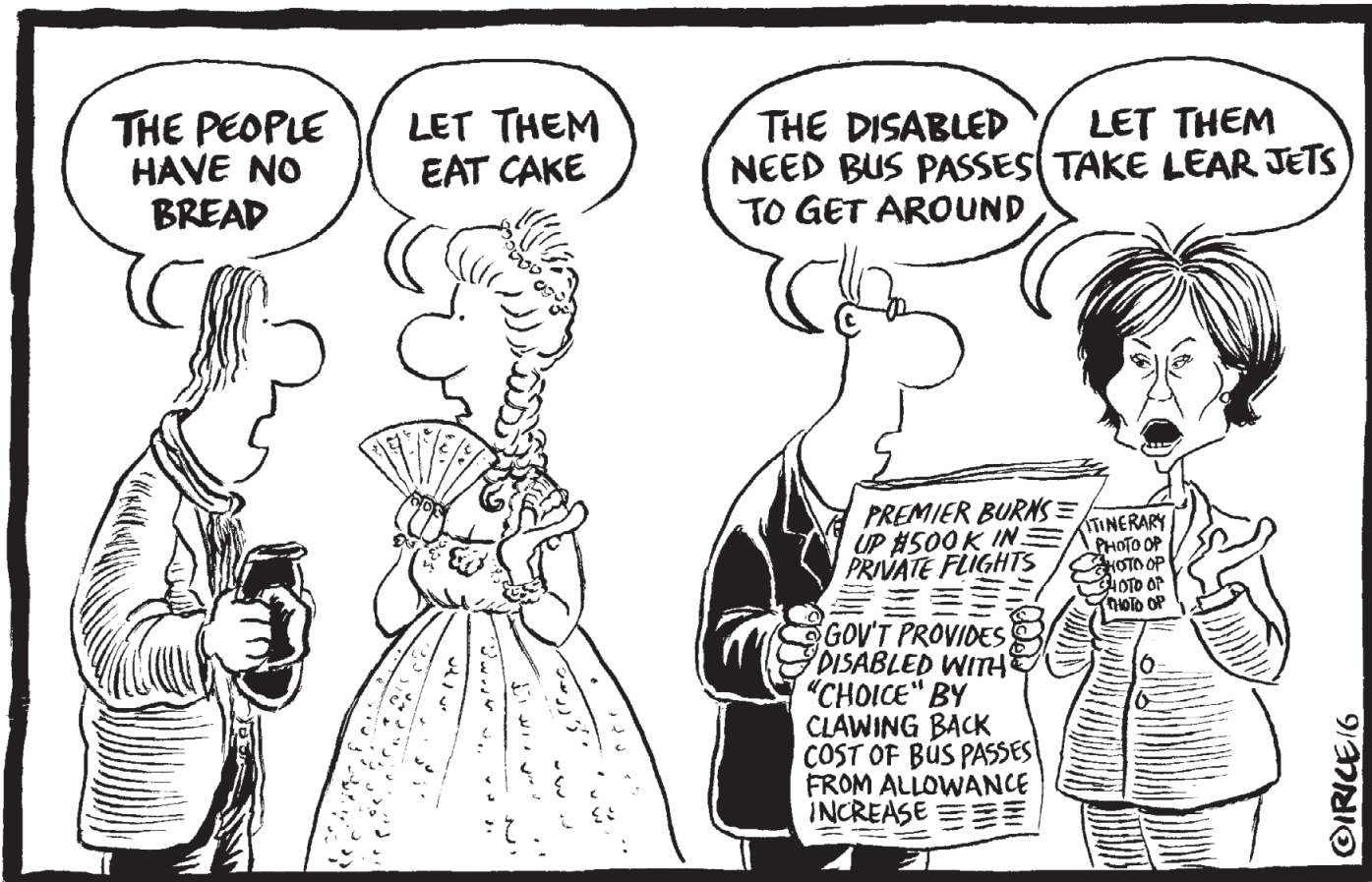
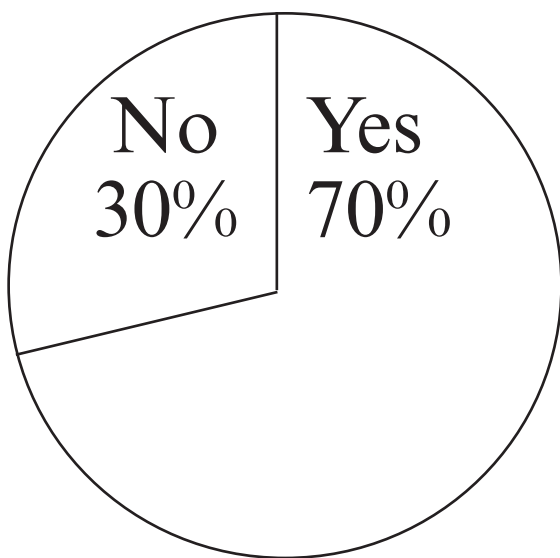
OPINIONS

Publisher Grant Harris, Editor Chris Gareau



Web poll

Do you agree with Smithers RCMP's four priorities of substance abuse, improving community relations, violence, and traffic concerns?



WHEN GOVERNMENTS LOSE TOUCH WITH THEIR CITIZENRY

Tax break to millionaires as school closures considered contrasts priorities



VIEW FROM THE LEGISLATURE
MLA Doug Donaldson

There was a very stark contrast in priorities that played out in the provincial legislature last week.

Education Minister Mike Bernier was asked a number of questions by us regarding the Christy Clark government decision to claw back \$54 million in so-called administrative savings from school districts.

Under the BC Liberals' administrative savings plan, school districts had no choice but to collectively come up with \$29 million last year and \$25 million this coming fiscal year.

For SD 54, that equates to \$380,000 over two years they must cut. And as school trustees and management revealed at a packed public meeting I recently attended, closing Lake Kathlyn elementary would result in savings of \$210,000 a year.

This scenario is being played out all over

the province as school boards scramble to come up with the cuts demanded by the government, and closing schools is put on the table.

It's not as if school districts are loose with the purse strings. Our education spokesperson Rob Fleming pointed out to the minister that a report that recently came out from the B.C. Association of School Board Officials showed that B.C. school district administrative spending is 30 per cent below the Canadian average and has the lowest per-pupil cost anywhere in Canada.

And meanwhile school districts have been absorbing increased expenses like BC Liberal hikes to the MSP tax, hydro rates and other costs, compounding the pressure schools are facing.

And now for the contrast. The Christy Clark budget includes

a \$264-million surplus, a \$100-million taxpayer-supported LNG fantasy fund called the Prosperity Fund, and a continued tax break worth \$236 million a year for the wealthiest 2 per cent in the province.

And that is why in question period last week I asked why the government is forcing school districts to close schools to provide a tax cut for the wealthiest in the province.

If this government had its priorities in order, it would scrap the 100-million tax-dollar infusion into the Prosperity Fund that was all about the Premier saving face, and use that money to ensure schools like Lake Kathlyn don't have to be closed due to a BC Liberal-mandated administrative savings plan.

— Doug Donaldson is the MLA for Stikine.



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