

Ralph Chapman: Schools' day of reckoning

By

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That was then. This is now. Time to repeal.

Then, last spring with warmer weather coming, school years' end within sight, and several months of acclimating to the reality that our newly re-elected Democratic governor was trying to implement his secret before-the-election school consolidation plan, only the Legislature stood ready to inject some reason into the political processes that seemed to have gone so astray.

Then was when those of us who were familiar with the issues were desperately trying to communicate with any who would listen what disaster lay ahead. We argued with logic, with facts and with principle. We confronted illogic, falsehoods and hype. We were accused of being "self-serving," "fiscally irresponsible" and "behind the times."

We tried not to personalize the apparent incompetence, irrationalities, inconsistencies and poor judgements we saw flowing from our government. We worked the system. It seemed to budge some, perhaps not enough. Of course it wasn't ideal. Maybe it was acceptable for some, maybe not for others.

Now, during the shortest days of the year, another school year half over, and the Legislature about to convene again having passed the school consolidation legislation more than a half-year earlier, we are collectively astonished at the position where we find ourselves, quite different from what we could have imagined.

Now, obvious not only to us but to many hundreds of volunteers who worked very hard over the past half-year to implement the consolidation law, and to school board members and town officials across the state, the consolidation law is set to cost the taxpayers a lot more rather than provide any relief. Many thousands of hours of effort have not produced workable plans.

Even proponents of the legislation now agree the law isn't working. Not a single regional consolidation plan covered by this law was completed by the deadline three weeks ago. Tens of thousands of signatures have been gathered on a citizen-initiated petition to repeal the law.

Wow. A lot has changed. With so many people now aware of the problems and inconsistencies, especially with the absence of the hoped-for taxpayer savings, surely something will be done to correct the problems that this legislation has brought.

Or will it? Even as public sentiment has shifted against the consolidation law, those in power are more entrenched by having participated in its design. Will our legislators, most of whom voted to enact this, be able to correct the problems knowing that they, themselves, helped cause the problems?

Is there anyone who can take reasoned leadership on this matter? Who will have the courage to admit her or his own mistake and speak forthrightly about the need to repeal the school consolidation law?

Now would be a good time to call upon your legislators, lest they find it easier to continue the pretense that the emperor is wearing some fine clothes. Now would be a good time to resolve to make your voice heard by your government. Now. This is now.