Celebrating Chartering @ 30 – MINNESOTA'S STORY

The future of chartering did indeed rest with the Senate so that is where the opposition focused its lobbying efforts in preparation for both the April 16th hearing on the charter bill and Omnibus Education Bill.

Senator Reichgott wrote in her book *Zero Chance of Passage* that Ted Kolderie wrote her a memo on March 25th which stated, *"The MEA clearly does not accept it (the bill). The state office has put out word to the local leadership to tell their legislators over Easter recess to defeat SF 630."*

In early April, the MN School Boards Association (MSBA) in its <u>*Legislative Update*</u>, wrote, "*It is being advanced as an extension of open enrollment and site-based management. It could also be perceived as an extension of the homeschool – in the other direction. …. Please share your feelings on this one with your legislators. The concept of chartered schools will be a part of the Omnibus bill unless we can prevent this idea from being established as state policy."*

The MN Federation of Teachers (MFT) and the Robbinsdale Teachers Federation, which had previously endorsed Senator Reichgott, joined in opposing the bill.

The Minnesota Education Association (MEA) published a four-page document titled "Why MEA opposes charter schools." The document called the concept of chartered schools "*insulting*" and a "*costly hoax*" that would create "*more bureaucracy*" and allow "*unlicensed teachers*". It then listed what they saw as six flaws in the charter school concept;

*"**First**, the proposal risks creating elite academies for the few and second-rate schools for the many – a multi-tiered system of public education with no guarantee of equity in facilities or curriculum…"*
*"**Second,** we depend on public schools to teach society's democratic values. This important charge could be thwarted by chartered schools…"*
*"**Third,** among the many "freedoms" proposed for chartered school is lax enforcement of standards. It is incredibly naive to expect the market to protect our children in a system with such a lack of accountability…."*

Fourth, *foremost among these lax standards would be the ability of chartered schools to hire nonlicensed teaching personnel....*"

Fifth, *the chartered school scheme would be costly. Additional layers of bureaucracy would be required to start up and oversee charter schools. ... It could be chaotic....* "

Finally, *chartered schools provide an open door to vouchers....*"

Senators were being bombarded with these concerns, objections, and myths about the chartered school concepts. Senator Reichgott wrote that some of her colleagues were "*down right angry*" about the union opposition. The questions and fears these myths raised required Senator Reichgott to try to calm things. She wrote, "*I spent a good part of my days calming fears among my colleagues and setting the record straight about what the chartering bill actually meant to do.*"

It led her to realize that the efforts she had made to find common ground with the unions and other opponents were never going to lead to these groups' support. So, the question as she put it was, "*Could we even pass chartering legislation through the senate and house dominated by union-supported DFL majorities if the teacher unions were fully mobilized against it?*"

In the end, the decision was to go for it (the Senate had already passed it in the 1989 and 1990 sessions). The charter school bill passed the Committee and became part of the Senate Omnibus Education Bill. The next challenge would be to have charter friendly members on the Conference Committee from both chambers.

Next Week – The Conference Committee – where real legislating happens.