

The Valley Breeze

5/12/2009

The picking of our pockets made legal

Thanks to the Caruolo Act the teacher's unions in communities throughout the state will be going to court and receive a judgment that, in effect, will take money out of the homeowner's pockets and put it directly in their own.

A court decision will surgically remove several hundreds of dollars from each homeowner, but, will the teachers notice the bleeding? I think not. Exercising leadership to them obviously means fatten my wallet and my pocketbook at any cost to the homeowner as taxpayer.

At a time when unemployment exceeds 10 percent and we're in a foreclosure crisis any recovery on the backs of the homeowner is simply unconscionable. The elderly, those receiving unemployment benefits, as well as working people who do not enjoy generous salaries and lifelong health benefits will have to choose between paying their taxes in order to keep a roof over their heads or paying for some basic necessities like food or medications. These are the human costs when you take from the needy in order to give to the greedy.

All this to be done, as is the case of the Cumberland administrator recently accused of felonies, so that an \$86,000 salary can provide him and others like him with even more money. Since I graduated from high school in 1970 I "can" do the math. $\$86,000 \div 180 \text{ days} = \478 a day . That's more than most people are earning in a week these days and far exceeds a week's worth of unemployment benefits.

It appears teachers have a carnivorous, almost shark mentality. I get to eat, my own kind if I have to, so that I might continue to enjoy a life uninterrupted during our fiscal crisis. Who cares about you? I have a contract and you have an obligation. Too bad for you.

I am expressing myself through a quality of calmness, believe it or not. And, that calmness leads me to ask what we, as taxpayers, are getting for our huge sums of money? For three or four decades now student test scores are chronically low and the dropout rate hovers around 40 percent. Where's the economic justice here?

Taxpayers are paying top dollar and we're getting a poor product decade after decade. The operant question remains. Where does responsibility for learning ultimately lie, for the high school student in particular?

Ask any teacher where the problem lies and the common response is "the kids don't pay attention in class nor do they do homework." Okay. Then why are we paying you salary increases so that you can show up for six hours a day and be a glorified babysitter offering custodial supervision?

Student performance is poor as is the grade on the report card I would give to administrators who purport to assess the ills of the educational system. When teacher's methods are determined to be just fine and the books very well designed yet students complain of both and the administration responds to such complaints with lofty phrases like "we have to begin to develop new partnerships and strategies for students" you are engaging in classic enabling. What's more, you're doing a disservice to the student, who is reportedly your paramount concern. For most, laziness is the problem, not attention deficit disorder. The diagnosis is a lack of self-discipline, not smaller class size.

Coddling the student population who blame teachers and text books is tantamount to letting the inmates run the asylum. The tail is wagging the dog. Give any student a new iPod with complicated applications to learn and believe me they'll apply themselves and learn them all and learn them on their own.

I realize it's easy for teachers to diminish the importance of so simple an answer. But what if it is the answer? The solutions put forth during the past three or four decades simply aren't working. In fact, grades have gotten worse and dropout rates increased. What has actually been achieved during the past 40 years during which the educational system has utilized it's usual archaic solutions? Answer: Failure. You've all failed to develop student performance and you've failed in not telling them, over and over again, it's you! It's not the "system." If you are misdiagnosing the problem you consequently mistreat the problem. This becomes the greatest thief of our time and efforts. It robs students and teachers of days, weeks, months, and even years.

When, and if, a student graduates from high school and hopefully pursues higher education there could be 50 or 150 students in a class. The responsibility to learn is placed squarely on the student in that environment. Learning requires paying attention in class, reading, and studying.

Here's an idea in hopes of inspiring students. Use a legitimate fear tactic. Create a slide show for the students that has as it's subject matter individuals in their 20s, as well as their 70s, who are pushing shopping carts in a supermarket parking lot, some flipping 'burgers, or greeting customers entering Wal-Mart.

And, point out all are working for minimum wage earning a paltry \$320 weekly for 40 hours. Tell the students this is not a "living wage" and define that for them. Tell the students that these low paying jobs are all they'll be qualified for which may lead them to sell drugs, steal from you neighbor, or rob a convenience store in order to supplement a meager income. Tell them: why risk engaging in illegal practices and breaking the law which could give you years in jail. Instead, you can go to college, study, become a teacher, and let the courts legally pick the pockets of your neighbors for you. Instead of time in jail you'll get summertime on the beach. Instead of life imprisonment you'll get a life of generous salaries and retirement benefits. Maybe that's the educational message that needs to be conveyed in order to inspire our youth. You're already setting an excellent example for them. Half your job is already done.

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- The writer is a licensed, independent clinical practitioner in private practice and also performs psychiatric evaluations at a large, local hospital. He has 30 years of experience in his field.

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