

Classroom lessons

Imagine if taxpayers were the teachers, and legislators the children. What do you think we'd be having them write on the blackboard 100 times at the end of the session?

As lawmakers set their sights on adjournment next week, House and Senate conferees begin the long hard slog toward compromise on tinkering with educating funding.

There will be no breathless announcement of "sweeping" or "historic" changes to how we fund education.

We've been there, done that, for good or bad depending on where you live.

The problem is that too many people — taxpayers, politicians, teachers, education bureaucrats — are relishing the fact that there is likely nothing to happen this session. Why?

Because none of the proposals so far being offered by lawmakers, or the Douglas administration, are meaningful reforms that are aimed at empowering parents, taxpayers, and students. Rather, they are simply meant to half-deliver some existential notion that they've "done something" to curb cost increases.

Taxpayers, and school boards, are already doing this. The increases in school budgets has slowed in large part due to declining enrollment.

At the beginning of the session, Senate Pres. Pro Tem Peter Shumlin, D-Windham, had it right. There were no easy solutions, and everyone was going to have to give up something.

Like health care reform last session, however, those words are easier said than a deed done.

The interested parties — school board members (who are not bureaucrats but citizens like the rest of us), teachers, lawmakers, and others — wanted the other person to take it on the chin.

In health care reform, it will take patients, doctors, hospital administrators, regulators, and insurance companies each willing to give up some control in order to make the system work better.

The same goes for education.

While the session might produce some bumper sticker response to education costs, let's hope that before the next session more is done to get to the root causes of increased costs.

We need to know how much unfunded mandates, health care, energy costs, and our number of school districts are costing us.

Putting a cap on budgets, while a start, will only create angst in most communities and place an even greater burden on volunteer boards to find more savings, when many costs are out of their control.

It's easy to say, cut special education or spend it more "efficiently." But, if you're the parent of a child with special needs, you know that means less, or inferior, services for your child to make that happen as the money is spread around.

There needs to be more creative thinking in Montpelier, and beyond, to rethink how we staff, deliver, and pay for education.

For example, an early retirement buyout may be a worthwhile idea to help reduce the number of teachers, given that 53 percent of all education costs are for teacher salaries, and long-term teachers earn the most.

If we want more young people to stay in Vermont, we need to be able to deliver to them the education that they need, and employers want. More importantly, we need to show that we value them in our community, and maintaining a strong school system is just one way we can do more than tell them we care.

Mission ... accomplished?

Plenty of political hay is being made about the anniversary of Pres. George W. Bush's infamous aircraft carrier speech telling us all major combat operations in Iraq were over.

For the thousands of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians killed and wounded since then, it comes as no comfort. Now, we learn that the Bush administration does not count those Iraqis killed in car bombings as part of its official tally to determine if its recent troop "surge" is working. Why? Because if you add those numbers in, it's easy to see that there has been an escalation in violence where the U.S. has intensified its focus.

Iraq remains a dangerous place, and increasingly the United States is finding itself between warring factions hoping to have a leg up in a post-occupation Iraq.

Now into year five of one of the most reckless foreign policy blunders in history, we can only wonder if the landscape of today's Iraq is what Pres. Bush had in mind when he said that forces had "prevailed."



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Focus on the people

Mark Powell is certainly correct in revealing the failure of environmental organizations to really protect the environment (*Vermont Guardian*, April 24).

Population growth is a root cause of our environmental degradation, particularly the suburbanization of Vermont due to people fleeing here from overcrowded states elsewhere.

However, environmental organizations should do more than simply acknowledge this factor in their literature and on their websites. Environmental leaders also have the responsibility speak out on this themselves when they have the opportunity such as in meetings, workshops, and in the press.

George Plumb
Washington

George Plumb is the president of *Vermonters for a Sustainable Population* (www.vspop.org).

Don't raid clean energy fund

As our Legislature looks to fund a new heating fuels efficiency program with a new tax on Vermont Yankee (*Vermont Guardian*, April

26), there are those who are suggesting that the needed funds may, instead of the Vermont Yankee tax, be found in the Clean Energy Development Fund (CEDF).

The suggestion to rob from the CEDF to pay for the new efficiency program is a zero-sum proposal and would be a significant step backward from reaching the goals set out in the creation of the CEDF.

Those suggesting that the CEDF is an appropriate pot of money for the efficiency program have failed to investigate the purpose, maturity, and activities of the CEDF.

When the CEDF was created by our Legislature in 2005, four main purposes were expressed:

- The creation of additional employment opportunities and other economic development benefits through the increased use of renewable energy and combined heat and power technologies;
- Increased use of renewably produced electrical, thermal energy, and combined heat and power technologies;
- The growth of the renewable energy provider and combined heat and power industries; and,
- The stimulation of increased public and private sector investment in renewable energy and combined heat and power related enterprises, institutions, and projects.

ects.

The CEDF has already provided critical funding for several farm "cow power" energy projects, for the solar and small wind incentive program, and is working towards providing funding for two combined heat and power projects on college campuses in Vermont. The CEDF has also provided funding for the public engagement process on Vermont's energy future, and for the agricultural economic development program.

As required by the Legislature, the CEDF has an appointed investment committee that has been working diligently with the Department of Public Service to develop a strategic plan for the expenditure of the funds that would meet the legislated purposes of the CEDF. The committee now has a plan in place to invest all the currently available funds in the CEDF by the end of 2007.

A wide range of renewable and clean energy projects from across the state are eligible for funding from the CEDF. Communities that want to re-power existing hydro dams, farmers who want to produce electricity from their waste and crops, home owners and businesses who want to produce their own renewable energy, colleges and towns that are seeking to produce power and heat for their

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continued from previous page

campuses and communities, and schools that want to lower their energy costs with local energy sources can all seek funding from the CEDF. There are no other sources of state money to assist these important projects.

To now pull the funding rug out from under the CEDF committee, just as it is about to begin their investment in clean energy, would be myopic and counterproductive. The CEDF needs to be left whole and be allowed to carry out its purpose.

*Andrew Perchlik
Montpelier*

Andrew Perchlik is the executive director of Renewable Energy Vermont.

Build more nuclear power plants

Every country has the right, in fact, the obligation to build nuclear power plants. Nuclear energy is the only effective way to end pollution, and, indeed, global warming. There is no other solution.

And on the subject of Iran, we should be helping them build their nuclear power plants, not standing in their way. The world must be assured, however, that they will not use those plants to enrich uranium for the purpose of making nuclear weapons. And on that note, I'd like to give our president some unsolicited advice.

Remember in 1972 when our greatest potential enemy was China? Pres. Richard Nixon shocked the world and changed it forever when he became the first president ever to visit China. At that time, China was considered a much greater threat to the United States than Iran is now. You know, there's an old saying, "If the mountain won't go to Mohammed then Mohammed should go the mountain." Pres. Bush, you should do what Nixon would have done. You should go to Iran, and you should go there now.

Such a visit could end the war in Iraq. And it would not only salvage your presidency, it could restore to us the worldwide respect we once enjoyed.

*Ralph Andrews
Agoura Hills, CA*

Caps are anti-democratic

The Statehouse was packed at the April 26 hearing on educational spending caps. The speakers' list was long and the chair cut the amount of citizen time so

the committee could hear from everyone. With complete unanimity, 60 citizens said that the caps in support of the governor's plan were unrealistic and alien to local democracy. Without resolving the underlying cost drivers, caps will only harm the quality of Vermont's education system.

The governor then said he intends to ignore this citizen input. He says the speakers are the "education establishment." The school board members who spoke were elected by the people to administer budgets approved by the people. They come from all walks of life and embrace the spectrum of political philosophies. Yet they all dedicate their time and energy to the good of their communities and children. To dismiss these people, the most involved and committed of our citizens, the ones with the deepest knowledge of school spending, is disrespectful to the harmonious and sound administration of the public good. It seems these are the very voices that have the most to offer.

Certainly, administrators and teachers added their voices. Yet are they not also citizens and don't they have the greatest knowledge to bring to the topic?

A theme of many speakers was that our children and our schools were being damaged in a political war between the governor and legislative leaders.

Others said the spending caps and other features of the bill are punitive, mean spirited, and cannot achieve the goals they espouse.

Still others asked, why this assault on education, one of the state's most successful enterprises, while the greater problems of housing costs, health care, and good jobs are ignored?

Yet others pointed to the facts that school budget increases, tax burdens, and school staffing were already going down — without Montpelier interference.

All citizens, regardless of political persuasion, must expect a higher standard of political behavior and a higher regard for the citizenry than is being demonstrated in this sad political display. That's the least the state and the citizenry deserve.

*William J. Mathis
Rutland*

William Mathis is superintendent of the Rutland Northwest Supervisory Union.

Thanks, Vermont!

I am so proud of your state, taking the first step in doing what's right, what should have been started long ago. I live in Texas, and though there are many here, feeling the same, there will be no impeachment action here — these macho guys don't have the guts. As a citizen of this country, I'm very proud of you. (*Vermont Guardian*, April 20)

*Martha Eberle
Dripping Springs, TX*

We are many

Please thank Dan DeWalt and the state of Vermont for all people in this country. Tell your state representative to search for "impeachment groups" on the Internet and show him the almost 900,000 signatures (on just one website) at www.votetoimpeach.org. We are not a "few" who are struggling against the corporate media to be heard.

Impeachment is imperative for the preservation of our nation and our Constitution. Impeachment is also imperative to help restore this country's world reputation. The Bush administration has damaged our country beyond words.

*Mary-Ann Freira
Red Bluff, CA*

Hooray!

Hooray for a state that even has the guts to talk about getting this crime ridden bunch out of office.

I am not too brilliant, but am not too blind to the way my country is heading downhill financially, the way our country is viewed by the majority of almost all other countries, the way we are being sold out by the jobs leaving the United States, the wide open borders we can't protect while we are losing our boys every day because of a lie by Pres. Bush and his buddies just to support their war machine.

I am ashamed to have these people representing me and my country and destroying the United States for my kids and their kids. Anybody with any sense at all can see the country being taken over by the influx of illegal aliens. How stupid could they be not to see it? Have all of these people got their head buried in the sand? Thank you and keep up the good work.

*Gary Roberts
Point Blank, TX*

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—John Harington (1561-1612)

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