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Glenn Reynolds

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A SWISS READER EMAILS about my Cato Podcast talk on education:

It was interesting for me to hear your talk given to Cato this past week, broadcast yesterday. As a Swiss, I support what you are saying.

*I am a citizen of both Switzerland and the United States. I attended university in the US at the Univ. of Texas and the Univ. of Pennsylvania, and have BSChE and MBA degrees from those schools dating 1965 and 1967 respectively. I am retired. I live in Switzerland, but I travel in the US to visit some family and to attend symposiums, like that for example at Hillsdale College this past January. While Manager of Engineering at Bechtel Corporation's office in Kingsport TN, I recruited often at your campus in Knoxville during the years 1987 through 1991. At that time, your university was unique in visiting and asking companies like Bechtel, Tennessee Eastman, Mead and others in the East Tennessee area simple but profound questions on a more or less annual basis. For example, "What should our graduates know and know how to do to be of greater immediate worth to your organizations?" In other words, "value added" questions. It will not surprise you to know that I hired young men, and a few young women, as engineering graduates from UT-Knoxville. Their strengths outside of academics: apprenticeship experience and an early appreciation of our challenges as private companies.*

*Here is why your short talk was of interest to me. We here in Switzerland have an educational system that bifurcates young students during their early teenage years between those which will pursue higher education as "Akademikers" (engineers, medical doctors, etc.), and those who will attend trade schools and become professional persons favoring more manual skills. As they progress in cantonal secondary schools, all receive sound historical, literature and art appreciation foundations. Students read classic books. All (including the future Akademikers) experience (largely unpaid) apprenticeships. The respect achievers have within the society is largely the same. We have here, in Nidwalden, a 2% unemployment rate. My opinion: the United States has a high structural unemployment rate (including a low 'labor participation rate') due to a seriously flawed educational model beginning with Kindergarten. You are losing an understanding of the founding principles of your country, such as what is the Natural Law. The role of parents in your system is no longer understood or deemed important. Study the Swiss model. It has practical answers that serve a free people and a free society based on private enterprise. There is no occupational or religious coercion. But, there is a well defined Judeo-Christian societal role of parents; of teachers, advisors, testing authorities and*

*of course the students. There is no "Common Core". Our cantons are all somewhat different in their academic curricula for the primary and secondary levels because the cantons are different. But they are united in the objective that as young men and women approach maturity, they complete rational paths that yield life skills having value within the society, and for which their remuneration is based on "the market".*

*I would be pleased to try to answer any questions you might have. I love the United States, and it pains me to see a problem there that could be fixed, but requires a sustained effort to change attitudes toward trades, and the important role of parentage.*

Thanks very much. Alas, there are large parts of our apparatus that depend on unfavorable attitudes toward trades, and parenting, making change difficult.

And I like hearing good things about my colleagues in Engineering, though to be honest, good things are pretty much all I hear about them.