

Proposition 103 is about more money for the teachers union

By Brian T. Schwartz

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *In the last two years, lawmakers have cut hundreds of millions of dollars in support to all levels of public education. In response, a group led by Sen. Rollie Heath, D-Boulder, crafted Proposition 103. The measure would, for five years, return state sales and income taxes to 1999 levels, meaning an increase of the income-tax rate from 4.63 percent to 5 percent and upping the sales-tax rate by 0.1 percent. It is expected to raise \$2.9 billion through 2016. Lawmakers would be required to spend the money on public education by increasing funding above the roughly \$4.3 billion spent in the current fiscal year. We asked Heath and Brian Schwartz, an opponent of the measure, to make the cases for why voters should or should not support the issue. The Denver Post editorial board will weigh in on Proposition 103 and other election contests later this month.*

— **Curtis Hubbard, Editorial page editor**

Do you want government to throw even more of your tax dollars at Colorado teachers unions and their pet politicians, or do you actually want better education for children in Colorado?

Proposition 103 is about throwing money. Sponsored by Rep. Rollie Heath, D-Boulder, and endorsed by Colorado's largest teachers union, the initiative would increase income tax rates by 8 percent and sales tax rates by 3.4 percent — both for five years. Decades of increasing school funding has not increased student test scores. It has created jobs for teachers and revenue for their unions that almost exclusively support Democratic politicians. These politicians sustain tax-funded schools as a monopolistic cartel that squashes competition and limits choice for parents and taxpayers.

Nationally, per-pupil spending has more than doubled since 1973, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Meanwhile, standardized test scores have been stagnant. According to The Nation's Report Card, 2008 math and reading scores were "not significantly different from" scores in the early 1970s.

Colorado is similar. Between 1997 and 2008, per pupil spending increased by 21%, according to inflation-adjusted NCES data. But the Denver Post reported that "scores on

Colorado's annual academic assessment again came back flat, a trend that continues year after year. The announcement of no change in scores has become a yearly mantra."

If standardized test scores don't track with increased tax funding for schools, what does? Here's what: teachers union contributions to political candidates who support the public school cartel. Inflation-adjusted teachers union contributions have almost doubled since 1990, according to [OpenSecrets.org](https://www.opensecrets.org). In each year, at least 94 percent of contributions are toward Democratic candidates.

Last year, the Colorado Education Association gave "\$1 to Republicans for every \$235 given directly to Democrats," reports [IndependentTeachers.org](https://www.independentteachers.org).

What do Democrats tend to do after teachers unions help get them elected? Last year's "teacher bailout" is an example. A Democratic Congress and president sent states \$26 billion in tax money to prevent teacher layoffs. These bailedout teachers pay union dues to again support politicians to further entrench the cartel.

But while test scores have been flat, unionized teacher employment has soared. According to NCES data, student-teacher ratios have decreased from 21 in 1973 to 15 in 2008. Using NCES data, education policy analyst Andrew Coulson found that government school employment doubled since 1970, while enrollment increased by only 10 percent.

A longtime president of national teachers unions got it right. "Public education operates like a planned economy. It's no surprise that our school system doesn't improve; it more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy," wrote Albert Shanker — in 1989!

If you really care about supporting children's education, you should not tolerate government's requiring you to fund schools just because you live near them. This is counterfeit caring — like saying you want to see good movies, but having a stranger choose which movies you see. Proposition 103 would perpetuate such counterfeit caring and cripple your ability to make a real difference.

By contrast, education tax credits promote authentic caring. Say you're taxed \$1,000 a year to fund local public schools. But you'd prefer to support a local school or scholarship fund that has proven its merits. You'd get a tax credit of up to \$1,000 for such a donation, or for tuition you pay to send your child to a non-government school.

If you chose to donate your earnings elsewhere, your local public schools would lose tax revenue. Not to worry. Quality public schools can certainly handle some competition. Further, the taxfunded schools would still have a huge competitive advantage, as they would still get thousands of dollars from property taxes, sales taxes and income taxes even from people who took advantage of a \$1,000 education tax credit.

If you want to enrich unions and politicians who support a wasteful public school cartel, vote for Proposition 103. If you want better education for all children, ask your politicians to support education tax credits, which promote diversity and choice for Colorado's families.