

Metropolitan News-Enterprise

Wednesday, May 12, 2010

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IN MY OPINION (Column) :

Los Angeles School Bureaucrats Take Advantage of Hard Times

By JON COUPAL

(The writer is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association—California’s largest grass-roots taxpayer organization dedicated to the protection of Proposition 13 and the advancement of taxpayers’ rights.)

In a state hard hit by recession, the Los Angeles area is even worse off than most. Its abysmal unemployment rate is over 13%. No one around here says they have enough money, except the divorcing owners of the Dodgers, Frank and Jamie McCourt, and each says that about the other, not about themselves.



So perhaps it should not come as a surprise that the Los Angeles Unified School District is once again approaching voters with strains of sad violin music in the background and tin cup in hand. This might elicit pity if the district had not already hit up taxpayers for five bond measures over 13 years to pay for a mammoth \$20 billion building program that has proceeded even though school enrollment has been declining for nearly a decade. Many Los Angeles homeowners are paying hundreds upon hundreds of dollars each year for new classrooms for which, in the end, there may be no students.

Now, the LAUSD bureaucracy says their situation is so dire that if they do not receive a taxpayer-funded cash bailout in the form of another increase in property taxes, they may be forced to lay off teachers. It is obvious why they threaten teachers. If they threatened to lay off part of the massive LAUSD bureaucracy, voters would not only vote “no” on the Measure E tax increase, they would vote “Hell no!”



The president of United Teachers of Los Angeles, A.J. Duffy, got it right when he told the Daily News last year, “This district has lived high on its hog for 10 to 12 years, while continuing to raise administrative and supervisory personnel even while student populations were going down. Now it’s coming back to harm them.”

For some, a teachers union president—in the state that has the second highest paid educators in the nation—may lack credibility on fiscal issues. But it cannot be denied that in a dispute over resources, the teachers hold the moral high ground. It is they on whom we depend to instruct our children, not the cubicle workers in the headquarters buildings.

So in a school district that has a budget larger than many states, where does the

money go? While pleading poverty, the district would have the public believe that it spends about \$10,000 per child, but before anyone is tempted to approve another tax for Los Angeles schools, or any other school district for that matter, they would do well to examine the newly released study by the Cato Institute (www.cato.org). The report titled, “They Spend WHAT? The Real Cost of Public School,” shows the actual amount spent by the LAUSD is over \$25,000 per pupil!



Why the huge difference between what we hear and what the district actually spends? It's because, like many school districts, the LAUSD excludes whole categories of expenditures that are necessary for schools to function, such as capital costs, debt service and employee benefits.

It's clear, taxpayers are already extremely generous, especially considering how much most are struggling. Voters would be wise to tell the district bureaucrats to shape up and do a better job of managing the billions of dollars they are already provided, at great sacrifice, by taxpayers.

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