

COMMENTARY

Is the sky really falling when it comes to public education?

By Ronni Hannaman

Change in education, it appears, is a tough thing to accomplish and has been an integral part of the national conscience since the 1930s.

For decades there have been so many critics, strong national teacher's unions as well as the state unions influencing legislators and protecting teachers and so much partisan politics, it's a wonder any of us has learned to read or do basic math or that we have any sort of education system at all.

Consider this statement found on enotes.com: "Americans in the 1960s became aware that the nation was suffering from a shortage of citizens whose education and training were sufficient to meet the technological challenges of modern society. The gap between the learning needs of the country and the capacity of the American educational system to meet those needs was at a crisis point at the beginning of the decade, and the resulting demands for more and better education forced reassessment of every segment of the teaching-learning process."

Sound familiar?

Just substitute the date 2011 and this assessment rings true today.

And this: "American education came under fire during the 1980s. Liberals cried out against budget cuts and rising student costs." Another headline that can be used today proving once again that little if anything has changed or that our memories are extremely short.

In our penchant to measure ourselves against other countries, we find that when it comes to education, we seem to be pitted against countries with a homogeneous population all versed in their native tongue and where education is funded primarily by the national governments. Ours is an increasingly heterogeneous or multicultural population and, as we continue to debate over whether our national language is English or what is the best teaching tactic,

we find ourselves slipping in our educational standings worldwide as other countries ramp up their educational programs.

Let's take a look at our own little heterogeneous community.

Since Carson City's population and ethnicity has grown, so have the challenges to provide equal education to a school population where many have limited knowledge of the English language. Couple this with many students coming from homes where there is a daily struggle to put food on the table, the ability to learn becomes even more of a struggle. The local charity, Food for Thought, estimates there are about 500 children in our community needing weekend food and many others who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.

The makeup of our elementary school population provides insight into the teaching challenges faced by dedicated teachers and principals who are striving to meet the No Child Left Behind standards, where if just one child fails, the whole school fails. And, when the schools fail, the city fails as well in the competitive market to recruit new businesses and young families and is then branded as having an inferior school system.

According to the Nevada Department of Education, Bordewich-Bray Elementary in the heart of downtown Carson City has a student population of almost 25 percent with limited English skills; over 59 percent of the student population at Empire Elementary fall into this category; 21 percent of the students at J C Fremont Elementary and over 49 percent at Mark Twain Elementary speak limited English. The remaining two elementary schools have a population of about 20 percent or less with limited knowledge in English. Testing in English Language Arts is one of the major tests that must be passed under NCLB.

Even though the lack of language skills poses much of the current teaching challenges in Nevada and in the West, let me assure you that in my research I found educational challenges of all kinds have been faced since the 1930s with each generation of leaders proclaiming the need for an educated workforce and whatever president in power proclaiming himself to be the "education president." In spite of this continued focus on the ills of our

national education system, we do not seem to have come a long way, baby, and the battle cry continues to be to spend more for better education and as it has been recently reported what is spent on education in each state can be a source of debate and is dependent upon who is providing the statistics.

Time for a little history lesson: Were you aware that it was not President Bush who started the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) concept? Originally instituted as part of his War on Poverty, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), with the Title I section aimed to improve the education of the nation's

poorest students. Then along came President Clinton who updated the law then known as Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). With the assistance of Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy and Democratic California Representative George Miller, President George W. Bush was urged to go one step further in 2002 to add sanctions for underperforming

school districts renaming the IASA as No Child Left Behind now putting more teeth into the former laws.

At his inauguration speech before the Assembly and Senate in February, Gov. Brian Sandoval introduced Michelle Rhee, former superintendent of the Washington, D.C. School District. This is one of the highest funded school districts in the nation yet with one of the lowest rankings nationally.

Rhee started her job with the intent to change the way in which the school district was run by ridding the system of incompetent teachers and principals, doing away with tenure and setting teacher compensation based on student results. Rhee's own tenure was short and the hue and cry continues as the teacher's unions fight to restore any "wrongs" Rhee may have instituted to make the system favor students instead of unions. In the end, it is always about the adults and not about the kids.

Many of Rhee's controversial reform policies are those now being proposed by the Sandoval administration.

I thought I had a pretty decent education way back in the 1950s when kids were held back if they failed testing standards needed to progress to the next grade. Everyone needed to know their math and

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COMMENTARY

Taxing businesses taxes the people

by Ronni Hannaman

Before you join the bandwagon to further “stick it to business” when it comes to looking for ways to fund government programs by raising taxes, consider this: You are the one who will possess the leaner wallet as you shell out more for goods and services.

It is no secret that any rise in business operating costs, such as government imposed fees and taxes, will be absorbed by you, the end user or buyer.

It would be better for your personal finances if you become an advocate of government running more efficiently and raising taxes only when absolutely necessary. Always remember, like business, government passes on the cost of government to you directly or indirectly. Have you checked your utility bills as of late or other bills that may show taxes imposed by government on business that is passed directly on to you?

Whenever there is a shortfall in government, business is the first to be considered for additional taxation. Business is considered the “deep pockets” of our society and has always paid its fair share in the running of government through the myriad of government imposed taxes.

Consider this: The less you pay in taxes, the more discretionary income you will have to make purchases and, in the end, the more government will have to carry out their programs because you will not have had to decrease your spending habits. The formula is actually quite simple: More spending equals more taxes and less spending equals less taxes. The less spending is why we are in our current situation.

Until government takes over retail establishments, airlines, grocery stores or the service industry, we need to remember it is the private sector that foots most of the bills for government. Taxing business taxes the people and that is not a popular subject for any politician as the cost of living continues to rise and gasoline rises to over \$4 per gallon.

No one argues that government must tax to provide services that cannot be provided by the private sector, but one can argue that like business, government must assess its programs and tighten controls on spending to remain successful.

Taxing business in each legislative session may have the unintended consequences for reducing spending levels even further. Everyone is affected by the imposition of new taxes. Buyer beware for those taxes come right off your bottom line. ■



Members of the Chamber's Leadership Carson City Class, the Young Business Professionals and the Reno Young Professional Network visited our State Capitol. Back Row: Earl Mays, Jeff Martin, Jon Steele, Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, Gina Teza, Lori Martin, John Wilkinson and Jason Woodbury. Front Row: Tina Nelson, Brenda Kolling, Karin Mracek, Drew Simmons and Yette Martell-De Luca.

Leadership students learn about government

By Ronni Hannaman

The Chamber's Leadership Carson City Class of 2011 recently spent a day at the Capitol learning how state government operates.

Joined by Leadership Reno, members of the Reno Young Professional Network and the Chamber's Young Business Professionals, the participants in State Government Day sat in on an important session of the Senate,

met with Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, heard from Secretary of State Ross Miller and learned how the Assembly works from Speaker John Ocegüera.

They also toured the Capitol, the library and archives and the Nevada Supreme Court.

Leadership Carson City is a nine-month annual program of the Carson City Chamber of Commerce providing insight into the many facets how our city operates. ■

To learn more about how you or your business can join the Carson City Chamber of Commerce call 775-882-1565 or visit the website at www.carsoncitychamber.com.

Leadership Carson City is one of the premier programs operated by the Carson City Area Chamber of Commerce. The future of Carson City will be in the hands of the leaders who graduate from this program.

Education

... from previous page

how to read and comprehend. The teachers wore business clothes and there was no doubt as to who was in charge. Parents monitored homework and you had to participate in spelling tests and diagram sentences. Those were the good days of education. Even those in the know admit the Baby Boomers received a better education than their parents or their children and children's children.

However, a search of articles on the Internet about the quality of education in the '50s and '60s (the Baby Boom era) was an eye opener. Even at that time, education was considered poor with critic Rudolph Flesch writing his first book “Why Johnny Can't Read” followed by a sequel in 1981, “Why Johnny Still Can't Read.” Flesch's premise was that phonics produces better readers while schools were teaching the same method as the 30s when the Dick and Jane books were the proven method of teaching.

Will the United States be able to compete on a world level with homogenous countries all speaking their national language and having the same cultural backgrounds? We are compared to South Korea with a population of 49 million and Finland with a population of 5 million (by way of comparison, NYC has a population of over 8 million) and Canada with an overall population of 34 million compared to the population of the United States at over 311 million, the third largest population base in the world after China (over 1.3 billion) and India (over 1.2 billion). When looking at statistics, it is well worth the time to do some personal research to determine comparisons

before swallowing what may not be a true assessment of the situation. Statistics always favor those providing the stats.

Will Nevada and the Western states be able to compete with states such as homogeneous Wisconsin? We need to think locally before we think globally and educate our children one student at a time providing them with the very best teachers. Most importantly, we need to somehow encourage today's parents to actively participate in the education of their child.

Realizing there are continued challenges in our education system, our local business community, through the efforts of the Nevada Manufacturing Association (NMA) and the Northern Nevada Development Authority (NNDA), are trying to make a difference and have formed a coalition to launch the nationwide Dream It! Do It! program to work with WNC and local school districts to better prepare today's students for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

In Carson City, the sky is not falling when it comes to education. We have a secure school system and a dedicated teaching and administrative staff ready to face the challenges of today and tomorrow. Though Western Nevada College is currently experiencing some funding challenges, the college works diligently to turn out educated citizens and the workers of today and tomorrow. ■



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Keep our city clean

The Chamber will not be coordinating the volunteer city clean up weekends as we have over the past few years due to a shortage of park staff. Therefore, we urge all citizens to bend over and pick up those ugly stray plastic bags that get stuck in the trees and bushes and the bottles and other trash so carelessly thrown by uncaring citizens. Since the snow has melted, we can see all the trash that has accumulated over the winter. Keeping our neighborhoods and parks clean should be the responsibility of us all. We continue to need to take pride in our city. A clean Carson City speaks volumes about its citizens!

England beckons

The hoopla over the Royal Wedding will be but a distant memory by the time we tour the highlights of Great Britain in October. The Chamber continues to coordinate trips to the most popular destinations in the world and we'll be taking a group to see a play in London, visit Anne Hathaway's home in Stratford-upon-Avon, walk around Stonehenge, tour beautiful Edinburgh and stay in a castle in Wales as part of the highlights offered on this tour. Go to the Chamber homepage to click on the itinerary or call us for a free brochure. Deposits must be in by May 25. Don't miss out!

Avid readers love Browser's Corner

There's nothing like a good book to while the time away as you sit on a long flight or just relax on a Sunday afternoon in the soon-to-be summer sun. If you think you can't afford the retail prices of either soft or hardcover books today, think again! Browser's Corner, just inside the Carson City Library, offers paperback books for \$1 and hardcover books begin at \$2 each. Stock up for your summer reading now or pick up a few good novels for that friend in the hospital. Receive your first paperback free by logging on to the coupon section on the Chamber's website. You'll love Browser's Corner!

USAF Commander's Jazz Ensemble to get Carson in the mood

As a preview of the Jazz! Carson City music festival coming in mid-August, the Mile High Jazz Band is bringing the always popular and acclaimed USAF Commander's Jazz Ensemble to our city on Thursday, May 12 at 7 p.m. This is a free concert for area residents. Joining them in the music-filled evening will be the Carson High Jazz Band. Free tickets are available at the Visitors Bureau, 1900 S. Carson St. More information visit: www.milehighjazz.com.

Oh what a beautiful mornin'

The Western Nevada Musical Theater Company production of Oklahoma! is coming to the Community Center the weekends of May 7 and May 14. Take Mom to celebrate Mother's Day for the matinee showing at 2 p.m. on May 8. Tickets may be obtained in advance 445-4249. If you haven't experienced musical theater produced by Stephanie Arrigotti and Gina Kaskie-Davis, you've missed out on performances that rival a Broadway production without the Broadway prices. Surprise Mom and take the whole family to enjoy this enduring smash hit! Even if you don't have a Mom, come enjoy any of the shows. ■



Business community welcomes Governor

The Carson City Chamber recently held a reception at the Nevada State Museum to welcome Gov. Brian Sandoval to Carson City on behalf of the local business community. From left: Chamber Chair Scott Dockery, Gov. Sandoval, Miss Carson City Marisela Avitia and Mayor Robert Crowell.

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The next issue of the Carson City Chamber of Commerce News & Views will publish in the Nevada Appeal on Sunday, May 22. The advertising deadline is Tuesday, May 17.

Ask about special rates for Carson City Chamber members.

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