



Free Press Viewpoints

Fix education before buildings

On Thursday the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill that would allocate \$6.4 billion for construction of new energy-efficient school buildings and renovation of existing buildings.

The bill requires that 100 percent of the funds go to that purpose by 2015, and a substantial portion of the money would go to schools on the Gulf Coast.

Supporters say it would create green energy jobs, which it would, and that it would vastly improve many aging school facilities, which is also true. These are all good things.

Opponents say it is increasing the role of the federal government in education, which is true for better or worse. I see a problem with this bill and that's not it. The problem is that we shouldn't be spending this kind of money when school district budgets are getting so tight that they are having to cut bussing, staff, activities, etc. It's like trying to fix a leaky faucet when your house is missing a wall.

What I see going on here is not a political power grab like the House Republicans (who almost all voted against this bill) are saying, but a public relations attention grab. Everyone wants to be seen as doing something "green." Green is a new buzzword that everyone wants to get in on. And the fact that it might help the economy and do something for education is icing on the cake.

But it's not fixing the problem with education. I may get a lot of flak for saying this but I think there is often too much emphasis on improving school buildings. Yes, many buildings are old, in disrepair and overcrowded. I know this first hand. I came from a school district that was overcrowded. I had elementary, middle and high school buildings that were quite old. Did that mean I had a bad education...? No.

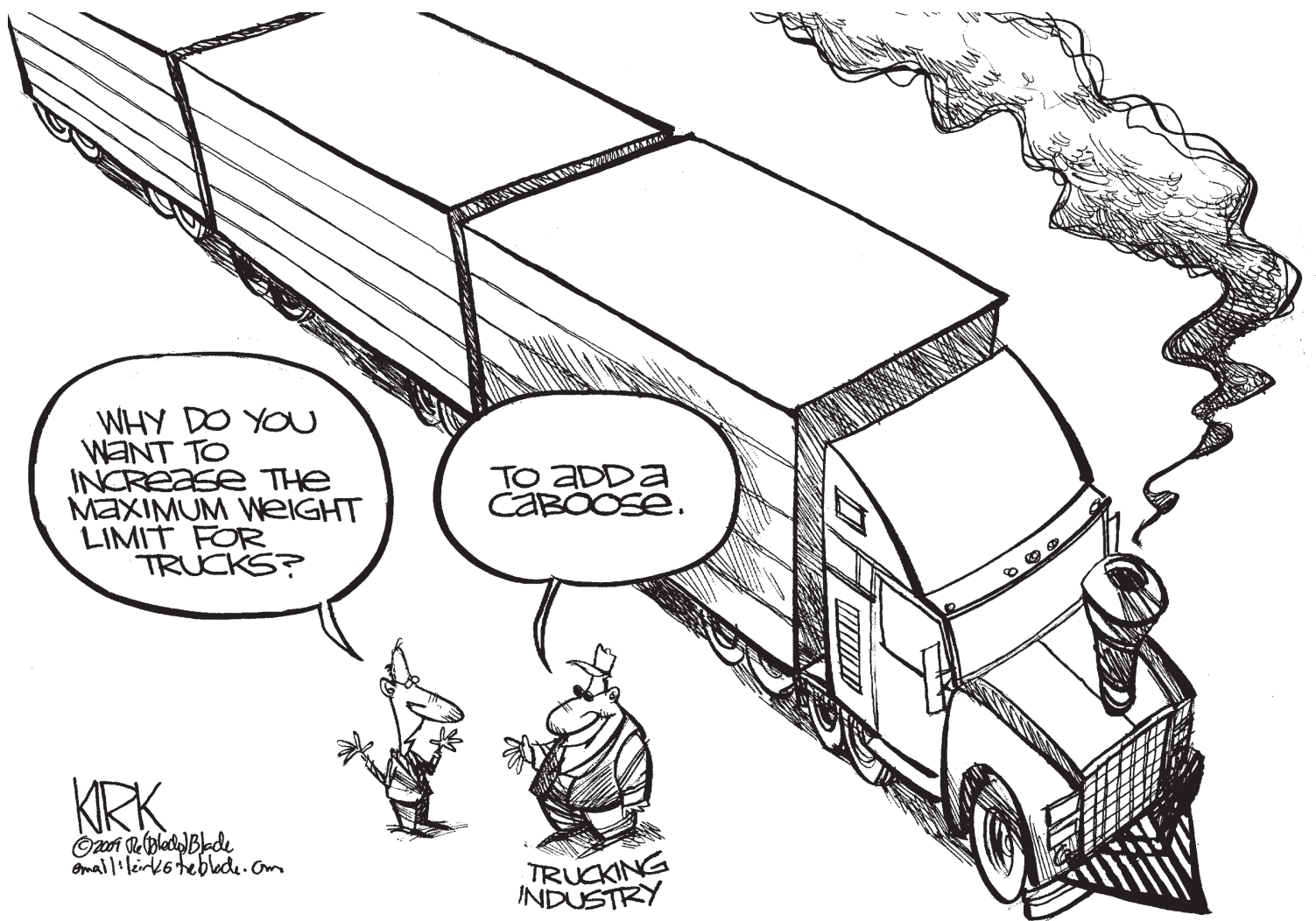
I'll tell you why. Teachers. Simply put, I had great teachers. It didn't matter that the school badly needed a good coat of paint or redone drywall or new desks or any of that. What mattered is that the school had teachers who cared about the kids. They cared whether or not we learned the day's lesson and they cared whether or not we did the homework. They cared that we were happy. And, most importantly, they had the knowledge and skills to teach us. I started my career in public education as a below average student. By the time I finished elementary school I was well above average in reading and writing. By the time I finished middle school I was an above average math student as well. I don't owe this to the building, I owe this to the teachers who took the time to help me.

This is where we need to put this money. In teacher education. One of my co-workers has told me about a child's teacher who was barely literate. This is where our problem lies. We need to make teaching schools the best schools in the world. We need to make competition fierce among districts for the best teachers. We need to pay them like movie stars. We need to make sure that the people who teach our children are the best and the brightest no matter where in this country you go.

Yes, fixing school buildings is good. But that won't fix education. If the money is there, then we need to put the money where it will do the most good, and that is the teachers. I would encourage readers to write or e-mail their representatives and senators in the hope that they will fix the big problems before fixing the little ones.

When the economy improves enough where we no longer have to be making budget cuts at the local and state level, then lets look at going green.

— Kevin Bottrell



Manufactured discontent keeps us apart

From time to time I switch on Fox News to see what issues conservatives are concerned about and to try and understand why today's Republicans still receive support from blue collar Americans.

I also watch the news network to see why conservative pundits have been so successful at driving a wedge between liberals and the working class. After watching shows like Hannity's America and the O'Reilly Factor I think I now have a pretty good grasp of why radical conservatives have been able to woo blue collar Americans over to their way of thinking.

Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck, Karl Rove and the rest of their like-minded peers are masters at manufacturing discontent. They are the political spin-masters who weave the webs of hostility and hate that leave progressives and working class people so tangled up in misperceptions and stereotypes that we are unable to see where reality ends and propaganda begins. And at times it seems like the doors of understanding that could exist between these two groups has permanently been closed. But I'm willing to believe that there is still a crack of light peeking out from one of the doors.

Whether or not the radical conservative movements mastery of the politics of polarization and division is due to the fact that they actually believe what they are preaching or because they simply know how to manipulate public opinion is a matter of opinion. I can't be inside their head, so I have no idea. I do have hunches, however.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

While I'm guessing Hannity and Beck both believe the far right, liberal hating, free market fundamentalist agenda they rhapsodize about on their Ann Coulteresque news shows, I believe guys like Rove and O'Reilly are con men whose modern day McCarthyism is nothing more than a propaganda weapon being used to bludgeon anyone who stands in their way. In reality when you strip away the finger pointing, hate-mongering and bullying of these two spin artists, what you're left with is two insecure little men who need to denigrate people in order to inflate their egos and fill their insatiable need to feel like winners.

While I loath the tactics of this group, I cannot help but be a little impressed by their success. They have perfected their role as self-employed intermediaries whispering in the ear of the construction worker and the farmer how much liberals hate America and want to turn America into a socialist country. They inform the brick layer with the calloused hands about how America-hating liberals want to charge people for torturing blood thirsty terrorists. They are only doing this because they loathe this country, they say.

There is no doubt that this level of propaganda would impress dictators around the world, but it certainly hurts the ability of Americans to really understand each other. I know many thoughtful conservatives whom I respect a great deal who could do a much better job of stimulating constructive debate between progressives and blue collar workers than the Faux News crew.

I will concede that we progressives have at times been as guilty as conservatives when comes to peddling the politics of division and hostility. Any liberal who criticizes the ideologues on Fixed News should also be willing to criticize other progressives like Michael Moore and Keith Olbermann who have engaged in some of the same hostile politics as O'Reilly and company. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. It's hypocritical to point out the splinters in a person's eye, without acknowledging the splinters in your own eye.

The time is now for a more respectful debate based on the actual and imagined differences that exist between blue collar workers and progressives. I would venture to guess we share a lot more in common than was previously imagined.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Other people's money attracts addicts

The dangers of opium-based drug addiction are well documented. Opiates are used to escape from difficult emotional or physical pain. But those who become addicted to the instant euphoria (what some call stimulation) of heroin and other opiates also experience devastating after-effects.

Clearly, we should avoid addiction to such seemingly easy ways out of our troubles.

So it is with OPM (Other People's Money), another feel-good opiate. The OPM cartel in Washington and dealers in all 50 states promise prosperity and well-being if we take healthy doses of OPM. They promise an invigorating short-term euphoria fed by promises of job-creation and the warming sense of easy prosperity, but the long-term deadening effects of OPM are just as dangerous and destructive to our society as is opium to an addict.

Euphoria is accompanied by cloudy thinking in government. Economic activity slows under the weight of new and higher taxes. Entrepreneurial vision is impaired and constipation attacks financial markets. Key systems fall into depression and financial devastation.

The cost of OPM addiction is staggering. First, there's the obvious cost of current and future generations of taxpayers in say, Kansas, paying for projects in say, California. Then there's the net loss of productivity from higher tax rates.

Government has no money of its own; it only takes Other People's Money and redistributes it. Every dollar confiscated for causes not driven by market forces is a dollar not spent on other activities.

Economist Henry Hazlitt says higher taxes discourage productivity and results in a net loss

Other Opinions

• Dave Trabert Flint Hills Center

to the economy. As he writes in "Economics in One Lesson," "the art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of an act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups."

But perhaps the greatest cost of OPM addiction is the gradual surrender of individual liberty to the government. Examples of current freedom grabs abound.

"Spent more than you earned? Here, take some more OPM; just give us control over your state and local budgets.

"Made some bad business decisions? Fire your CEO and we'll keep supplying you with OPM - but you can keep the union officials (who made equally bad decisions) because they're our friends.

"Oh, and by the way, the government will decide what treatments your doctor can provide based on cost effectiveness."

To paraphrase Nobel-Prize-winning economist F.A. Hayek, every step toward central planning and more government authority is a step down the Road to Serfdom.

But the devastating effects of OPM addiction are not just economic theory; there is ample historical evidence supporting it. Many Americans were raised to believe that OPM

brought the country out of a depression, but historian Burton Folsom exposes a different scenario his new book, "FDR: New Deal or Raw Deal?" Folsom quotes Roosevelt's Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau: "We have tried spending money. We are spending more than we have ever spent before and it does not work ... After eight years of this Administration, we have just as much unemployment as when we started ... And an enormous debt to boot!"

We must resist the temptation of the seemingly easy way out and Just Say No to OPM.

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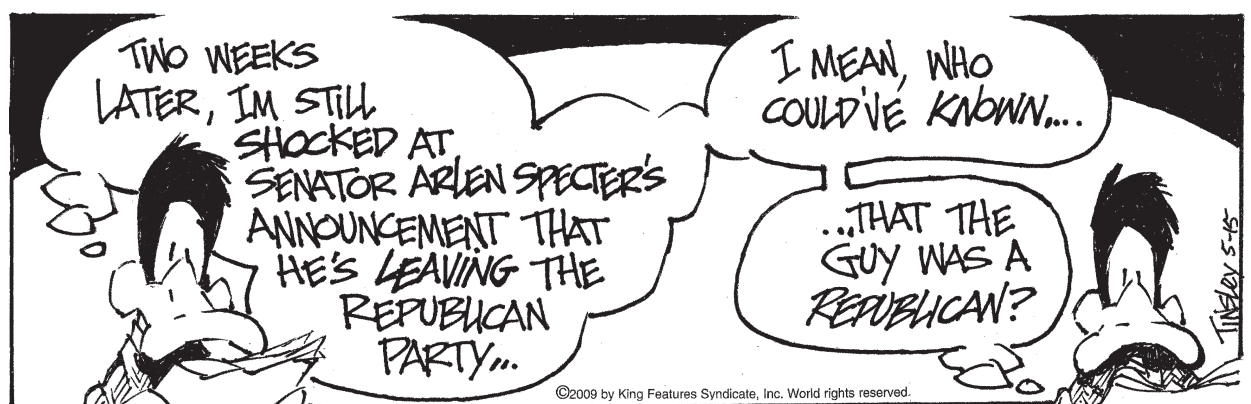
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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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