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FROM: Deanne Siemer

MESSAGE

HERMAN --

The Rechebei article looks very good. It is a little long for newspapers. I've suggested a couple of cuts. Would she publish it? Would be nice to have something under someone else's name. Another way to do it would be to collect the parts about the college and run them as one piece; then have a separate piece on PSS.

The edits I have suggested are not disagreements with what is said -- only efforts to get it down to what the newspapers will print.

Deanne

Deanne

PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM — PART I

It is understandable that officials of ~~both the community college and~~ the public school system are wary of A 13. Amendment 13 proposes to limit their respective control to a more well-defined and realistic set of parameters. At a time when the educational community has become a strong proponent for local control through restructuring of the way education is managed, it would seem that amend 13 would be a welcome change and will set the stage for real decentralization of control.

Amend 13 will, for example, effect the following:

For the public school system, decision-making will be decentralized to the three senatorial districts through the elected boards of education and its administrative representative such as a local director of education. ⁹ The key function of the appointed secretary of education will be in areas of policy making that will affect the CNMI as a whole and in the regular monitoring of the implementation of these policies. For example, the secretary of education will be responsible for the establishment of the basic graduation requirement throughout the CNMI; the local boards will have the flexibility to go beyond the requirements within its own means if it so desires and will be given the flexibility to use the most appropriate and reasonable approach to meet the requirements. ⁹ The secretary of education will oversee CIP projects for the entire CNMI, distribution of funds on a per pupil basis for each local education entity with consideration for extra costs such as for the students in Rota and Tinian, relationship with funding agencies such as the grantor agencies and will also ensure that the educational system of the CNMI will be in synch with the overall social, political and economic goals of the CNMI.

It is anticipated that the decision-making process will involve both levels, state-wide and local. Issues that deal with CNMI-wide education matters will be deliberated in consultation with the local boards or directors of education. Issues that deal with local education matters will be deliberated in consultation with the local community.

This amendment firmly places the issue of accountability where it should be ~~at both levels~~. At the state level, the secretary must ensure that minimum educational standards are being met through regular assessment and evaluation of performances of both instructional staff and students. At the local level, ~~they~~ must ensure not only the attainment of basic requirements but also any other educational program requirement. The local boards will be responsible for the staffing, provision and implementation of state-wide and local educational policies and programs. They must submit a budget extraneous of the state budget and will be the expenditure authority for their respective appropriations. ^(the local boards)

The executive branch should be able to have a say on the CNMI-wide standards and the local school level should have a say on their respective administrative and instructional agenda within the parameters of national standards which are at best, the basic minimum but hopefully, quality minimums. Hopefully, the local education agencies will be able to meet these minimums and more. Amendment 13 makes that possible and any institution that is doing the right thing should not fear the collective wisdom of its elected body as long as the institution can defend and justify its position. God forbid the day when we no longer trust the very leaders that we educated.

Amendment 13 is an idea whose time has come. Are we prepared to accept this challenge and be accountable for our own actions?

POST-SECONDARY -- PART 2

At the postsecondary level, amend 13 allows for institutions of higher education to be established by law. The existing community college is ~~merely~~ one of the institutions that ~~will be~~ legislated.

} has been

Should the government permit the establishment of a university or a medical school, for instance, this amendment will make that possible.

This amendment ~~should be a refreshing educational endeavor on our part and~~ should make it easier, even for the existing community college to evolve should it be able to do so.

As for the issue of accreditation, let it be clearly understood that accreditation is not the only driving force behind education regardless of the fact that accreditation is symbolic of sound educational practices. Yet, the process for accreditation demands self-study, setting of sound goals, and a well planned series of phases for attaining those goals. In other words, this is a self-imposed requirement on the part of every educational institution. The benefits of accreditation of course is easier articulation with U.S. based institutions. However, ~~closer scrutiny of the process of student selection by postsecondary institutions in the mainland reveals other more important variables such as financial ability to pay for tuition, performance on certain tests, grades and courses taken.~~

Keep in mind that U.S. postsecondary institutions enroll thousands of foreign high school or postsecondary grads from institutions that are not U.S. accredited. We all have read reports of U.S. students performing lower than certain foreign students in math or instance. This is not reflective of the fact that these institutions are not accredited but that they have the ability to reach these high performance levels somehow. Accreditation, unfortunately, has been used by institutions too often that it has become an expected argument without basis. I would like for the Accreditation Commission to clarify this issue once and for all. Certainly, the commission will not wish to be used as a scapegoat for the failure of any accredited postsecondary institution that does not produce well educated citizens. Legislation should be able to demand higher performance standards from our local educational institutions, accredited or not, and why not. Accreditation is not an end in itself; the product will speak for the institution. Our high schools have been accredited; yet, our own community college continues to blame the schools for not producing students who are ready for college. One wonders whether our accredited college is blamed for producing students who are not ready to tackle higher courses in universities and colleges abroad. At

this time and age, education is changing by leaps and bounds. Perhaps we should reassess our accreditation process and see whether it is really meeting our needs in these rapidly changing times. Amendment 13 will not take away the prerogative for schools to set high standards although fiscal and other realities such as irresponsible management might. This is not a perfect world and it is up to us to make the best of it.

Finally, education will continue to be one of the most important political agenda for any politician, good or bad. Pointing a finger at politicians as unreliable and indecisive merely shifts the blame for poor quality education. We must keep reminding ourselves that autonomy is not necessarily synonymous with quality. Maybe it is about time that the representatives of the people start having a say in the post-secondary education of its citizens and not just leave it in the hands of well-entrenched officials who may be bent on perpetuating their own empires at the expense of the CNML. The hands-off attitude of autonomous agencies could sometimes lead to complacency and the lack of accountability. The legislature must be able to examine all taxpayer funded activity including the college and the school system.