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Post Convention Committee

During the next few days you will be hearing and reading a lot about proposed Amendment #13, which deals with education in the Commonwealth. No proposal made by the Third Constitutional Convention has aroused the same degree of interest as Amendment #13. The debate has been good: it has focused on whether the amendment was needed at all, whether local school boards are better than a single Commonwealth-wide board, and whether more funds will be available for instruction under the proposal. Let me explain how this important proposal was arrived at, how it would operate, and respond to some of the criticisms that have been made over the past several weeks.

Change in our Educational System is Required

This is really the heart of the matter. The delegates -- many of whom were or are practicing teachers or administrators -- were convinced that dramatic reforms are required in the Commonwealth to improve the education of our children. This is what they heard from the voters when they were campaigning; this is what they have seen in their own families. People in the Commonwealth are not satisfied with the quality of education that their children receive in the public schools. They are expressing this in many ways -- one of which is reflected in the number of children attending private schools here and in the States.

Opponents of Amendment #13 rarely defend the current educational system and its results, as reflected in the attainment levels of the children graduating from the public schools. They would rather debate the fine points of Amendment #13 and basically oppose any change whatever in the current system. The delegates were not prepared to do this. They felt that ten years under the current Commonwealth-wide board system was enough and that drastic changes were required. If the voters disagree with this analysis, then they should vote "No" on Amendment #13.

Parents and Voters Need More Information and Accountability

One of the central problems about the current public education system is that the parents and the voters really do not know where the money appropriated to PSS is going. Parents and voters are entitled to know how much money is going for instructional purposes, as compared with administration, and how the money is being divided among the individual islands and schools.

We all know that most of the money appropriated for the public school system goes for personnel. But the real question is: what kind of personnel? There is widespread concern in the community that enough money is not going for teachers and teaching materials, but is being used for administrators that sit in the central offices and rarely, if ever, visit the classrooms where the

real work of teaching is done. School systems in the United States generally suffer from an excess of bureaucrats and a shortage of skilled teachers. Communities across the United States are wrestling with the problem and the Northern Marianas should join this effort . But you can't tell what is going on, unless the budgets submitted by the Public School System and considered by the Legislature clearly indicate how the money is going to be spent.

Another concern in the community is whether the money is being allocated on a fair basis to individual schools. Putting capital improvements aside, are the children on the different islands and in different schools being treated equally? If not, why not? Statistics issued by the Commonwealth Board raise very serious questions on this point. They show that some schools are receiving more than \$4000 per enrolled student, whereas others are receiving less than \$2000 per student. Why is this? The parents and voters need to know.

Parents Want More Involvement with the Schools

Parents want better education for their children. They want more and better information about where the money is going. And they want more involvement with the actual operations of the schools that their children attend.

Participation in PTAs, although useful, does not meet this basic desire to have more input into the actual operation of the schools. Parents want to have more say over the principal's administration of the school's funds. They want to have more say over the special needs of the children in their community. They want to be in a position to influence the educational standards established in the Commonwealth and the curriculum selected by the educational authorities.

Conclusion

This is why Amendment #13 has been proposed by the delegates. In tomorrow's article I will explore how Amendment #13 will work and how it will address these three basic shortcomings in the present system.