

P O I N T O F V I E W

OUR VIEW

No Big Money = Kids Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act is, in part, an abject failure in the sense that it's not lived up to the hype of its moniker: Children have, in fact, been left behind. Most education proponents agree that increased accountability is good, and lifting achievement, especially in struggling schools and school districts, is not only beneficent but also a moral mandate and, to the extent that NCLB has done both, President Bush's landmark legislation is welcome. However, failure, like the Devil, is in the details.

NCLB's problems are legion, starting with the biggest: It's an underfunded mandate. Noble as it is, the goal of making all students academically proficient is pie in the sky unless there is 1) enough money to do it and 2) wiggle room to be able to adjust, change or scrap bad policy. NCLB's rigidity is also part of its fallibility: It makes no exceptions for the many subsets of students—disabled children, English as a Second Language pupils, those with special needs and behavioral disorders, and so on—who are comprising greater numbers in schools across the country. Making these students pass the same tests as mainstream students without providing them additional resources—in some cases, vast resources—is patently unfair and a set-up for a let-down.

NCLB also seems to discount the fact that students in poorer schools—with less resources and access to resources—score significantly lower on standardized tests than their White and Asian counterparts. While additional support and tutoring can help close this gap, it'd cost billions, money that NCLB doesn't call for. In theory, allowing parents to exercise the option of transferring their children out of poor performing schools seems practical, but in reality it merely shifts the problem. Not only does the poor-performing school get left behind—consistent underperforming schools are subjected to state takeover—but the school that receives the new student(s) could be thrust into an environment for which he or she is academically unprepared. If enough students transfer to said school, it, too, could join the ranks of the underperforming. Thus, continueth the cycle.

Another signature problem with NCLB is all the accountability criteria. NCLB measures schools on 135 factors; fail in any one area and onto the needs-improvement list a school goes. A record number of Clark County School District campuses made the list this year—82, up from 18 in 2003. As many as 20 schools landed on the list simply because the percentage of students eligible to take each of the six assessments given last year didn't reach the 95 percent barometer.

John Kerry says he can do better—it's hard to do worse. His website lists a four-point plan.

— Establish a National Education Trust Fund to ensure that schools get proper funding; reward teachers and schools that improve and meet higher standards.

— Offer teachers better training and better pay for working in troubled schools; make sure teachers who don't belong in the classroom don't stay there.

— Create a "School's Open 'Til Six" initiative to offer after-school opportunities to 3.5 million children through programs that are open until 6 p.m.

— Offer a fully refundable College Opportunity Tax credit on up to \$4,000 of tuition for every year of college; aid to states that keep tuitions down; and launch a new effort to ensure that all of our workers can get the technical skills and advanced training they need. He also notes that U.S. school construction needs top \$127 billion.

On it's face, Kerry's plan seems good. But if he wins the presidency and plans on following through on his promise to reform education, he'll have to do what Bush didn't—fund it. And funding opens a whole new can of worms. Kerry hasn't said how he'll pay for this educational reformation. With \$200 billion committed to Iraq through September 2005 and a \$140 billion corporate tax package just passed, he'll be hard-pressed to find any money.



Bill Young: 'Real deal' sherriff

By Louie Overstreet
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Sheriff Young can accurately be labeled as a "Sheriff for Change." While campaigning for the office of Sheriff of the Metropolitan Police Department, he indicated that community involvement in promoting safe neighborhoods would be one of the cornerstones of his law enforcement efforts on behalf of the citizens of greater Las Vegas.

The title of Sheriff is basically akin to that of the Chief of Police or Public Safety Commissioner in other regions of the country. My guess is the position Bill Young holds is still called sheriff because he has to "ride herd" over a very large area of desert.

I know this is weak, but it's the best explanation I could come up with at this time.

Well, in any event, I have come to appreciate the fact that Sheriff Bill Young is the "real deal." I know him to be the real deal based on three facts. He is a man of his word as evidenced by his carrying out a campaign promise to involve the community that is most heavily impacted by crime through the establishment of a multi-racial citizen advisory committee to provide input on what constitutes effective law enforcement.

Involving citizens in the affairs of a police department can meet with a good deal of



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resistance from rank and file officers. In spite of this, he has demonstrated the courage to bring about needed reform in the police department. Also, he has promoted two African-Americans, Cliff Davis and Greg McCurdy, to the rank of Deputy Chief.

At a recent community meeting arranged by Mujahid Ramadan between the Sheriff, several of his direct reports and two dozen or so persons active in community affairs, a draft of a community action plan was unveiled.

The plan is basically a blueprint for realizing the vision: "A transformed West Las Vegas neighborhood that provides a favorable and revitalized environment for family growth and business opportunity."

West Las Vegas is the oldest area of the city and its inhabitants include a mosaic of low-income Blacks, Browns, and Whites. Also, it is a community where gangs often "ply their wares" out in plain view of the residents. The action plan is designed to address this criminal ele-

ment and the related social problems that crime causes in a neighborhood.

The plan identifies four stakeholders as community stewards in the process: the community, businesses, local government and the police department.

The plan addresses the issues through collaboration among stakeholders and with the trust needed to develop goals based on the expertise the various stakeholders bring to the table.

The plan states that collaboration is important from a half-dozen perspectives:

1. Accomplish what individuals alone cannot
2. Prevent duplication of individual or organizational efforts
3. Enhance the power of advocacy and resource development
4. Create more public recognition and visibility
5. Provide a more system-

atic, comprehensive approach to addressing community problems

6. Provide more opportunities for new projects and follow-up

An effective collaborative effort should be capable of building trust based on the following types of interaction:

- Establish ground rules that create a tone of collaboration and support good communication
- Making personal one-on-one contact with fellow stakeholders
- Listening to and showing respect for what each stakeholder has to say
- Always follow-up on pledged commitments
- Do not rush the process of change
- Address, do not ignore problems as they arise.

The only thing missing in the plan is how an increase in (See Overstreet, Page 14)

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