

OUR VIEW

Hardest Lesson

Teachers are underpaid. We know, we know: Tell you something you don't know. Well, you may know that Nevada teachers are ranked 26th in the nation in terms of pay, earning \$42,254, compared with \$46,752 nationally. While the discrepancy may not seem gargantuan—more on that later—you may not know that the Nevada figure is skewed. The state's middle-of-the-pack rating is mostly due to large numbers of veteran teachers—they've earned multiple raises and worked toward and/or amassed advanced degrees, which also boosts pay. (Teachers earning \$42,254 have, on average, nine years of experience and have completed 32 graduate school credits toward a master's degree.)

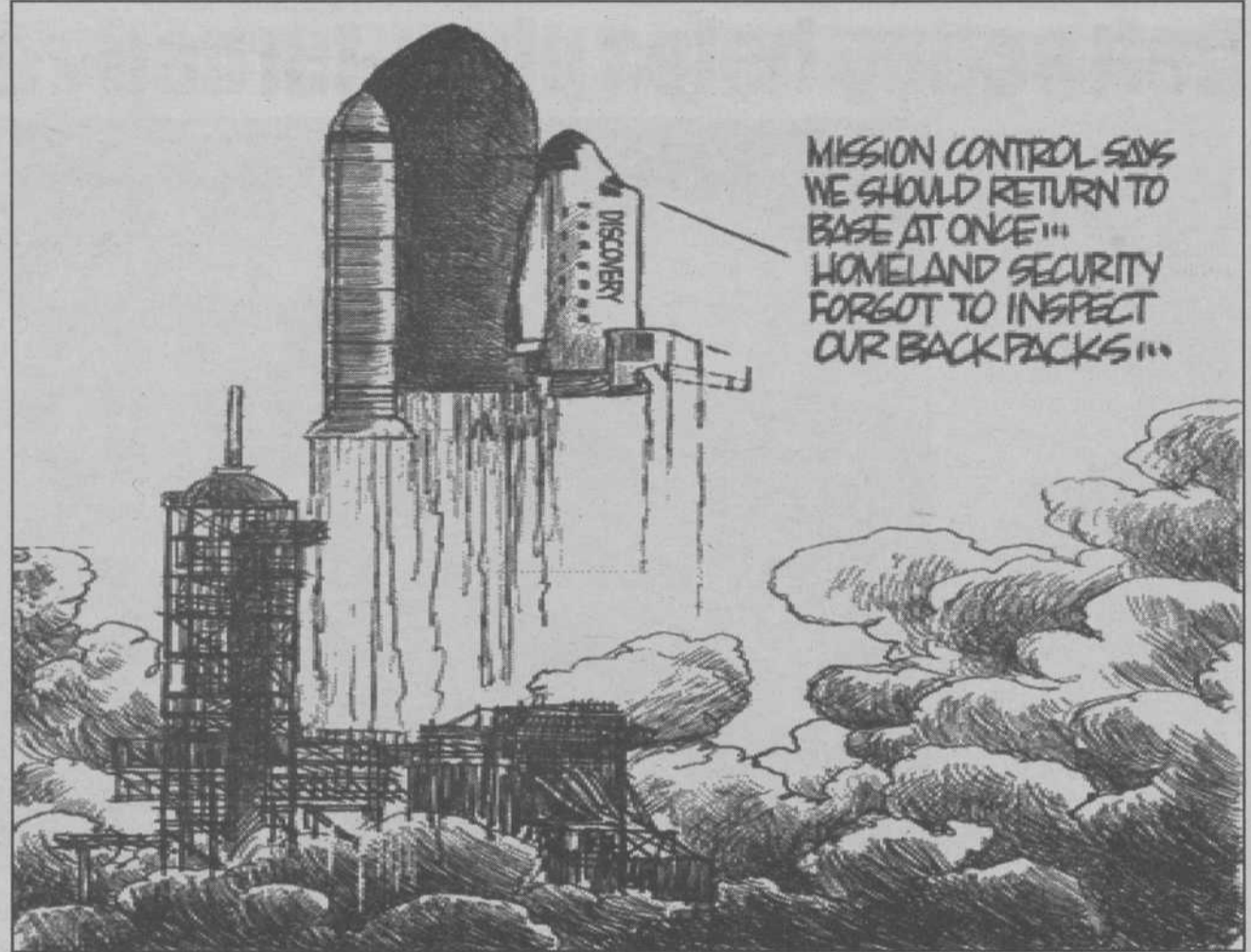
In the past, groups like the Nevada Taxpayers Association have used the teacher salary ranking as ammunition, arguing against funneling taxes siphoned from businesses into public education. Of the historic and controversial \$833 million tax package passed in the 2003 legislature, only \$140 million went to education. The figure sounds like a lot but it didn't go far. State public education officials said it merely helped Nevada's 17 school districts maintain their middling status quo. Per-pupil expenditures increased slightly as a result of tax package—ditto for the 2005 legislative session. Teacher salary increased passed in the 2003 and 2005 legislatures, but money won't stretch far.

To wit: Did you know that the average starting teacher salary in Nevada is \$28,000? Did you know that this is among the lowest beginning salaries in the nation, about \$10,000 less than starting wages for comparably educated professionals in similar fields? Did you know that many teachers have taken to bunking with family, friends and co-workers and/or taking second jobs just to afford apartments, not homes, in good neighborhoods? Did you know that Clark County School District teachers spend an average of \$800 on necessary supplies for their classrooms? Did you know that pursuing advanced degrees costs about \$5,000, which is the same amount of money they'll get for earning a master's degree—basically a break-even proposition? Did you know that teachers' raises in the last few years have lost ground to inflation, essentially wiping out the gains?

Combine all of this with a once-in-a-blue-moon real estate market that has seen residents reap six-figure windfalls by selling their homes and the average price of a house jump from \$132,000 in 1997 to nearly \$300,000 and you begin to see the dilemma new teachers face. You might know about the relocation assistance offered by the Clark County School District, typically \$2,000. But the money is a pittance, barely sufficient enough for a down payment and certainly not enough for closing costs. Noble as the Las Vegas Homeownership for Educators Program is—setting aside \$500,000 in city of Las Vegas funds to offer teachers up to \$30,000 to buy a home—it'll only help 16 to 17 educators, leaving more than 2,400 (the district expects to recruit 2,500 for the 2005-06 academic year) out in the cold.

It's no wonder that in recent years the school district has found itself scrambling in the weeks before school starts to hire 600 or more teachers. Who wants to work in a place that's rapidly becoming too expensive to live? Who wants to toil in a district that's constantly outgrowing capacity, often forcing teachers and students into portable buildings? Who wants to have to dip in their already cash-strapped pockets to buy classroom supplies? Who wants to teach in a district that seems mired in mediocrity and could very well remain that way for years to come? As long as the school district grows by leaps, there will be more students needing remediation, needing to learn English, needing to be mainstreamed, needing disciplinary measures. Keep in mind that No Child Left Behind legislation will be bearing down. Who wants to take the blame when significant numbers of students can't pass the proficiency, when standardized test scores lag, when racial disparities in achievement surface, when parents gripe, kids complain and administrators crow?

Come to think of it: Know anyone that needs a job?



What's up with talented tenth?

Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois wrote "The Souls of Black Folk," and in this quintessential African-American novel he committed himself to and charged the fledgling Negro elite, that he called the "Talented Tenth" with the obligation of advancing the racist ravaged plight of the masses of African-Americans. In general, the role of the Black elite in the 21st century, according to DuBois is to outreach to Black popular society, the Black masses.

W.E.B. DuBois and his comrades were committed to the upward mobility and economic empowerment of Black folks, and their ideas were reinforced by Black churches and their congregations. The participants belonged to all kind of professional and mutual benefit type associations. This commitment contributed to the consolidation of the Black elite's outreach to the Black masses.

These Black associations translated not only their membership but also their financial resources into multi-layered social service agencies which created an inter-class linkage between the Black elite sector on one hand and the 90 percent lower stratum majority of working class Blacks on the other hand. Hence, the "Talented Tenth," the 10 percent elite.

Where is the "Talented Tenth" among our Black



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

elites today? Where are the churches in being the catalyst for encouraging and promoting economic empowerment for Blacks today? Where are the Black elites, the professionals, organizations, fraternities, sororities, etc.? Where is the Black elite when it comes to supporting our businesses and recycling our dollars? Why aren't we pooling our financial resources, forming our own banks so that we can get fair treatment and equal loan terms? Why aren't we forming our own schools so that all of our children can be educated and not just the ones that can afford to go to a private or charter schools?

Black elitist in the 21st century have a tremendous obligation to bear in regard to replicating an outreach to Black masses comparable to the pattern fashioned by the formative phase Black elite from the 19th century to the 1940s.

The Black elite at the dawn of the 21st century is better situated and has more economic, social and political capabilities to fulfill its outreach leadership obligations to the Black masses than any previous generation of African-Americans.

Over the years, and in my

travels, I have heard a great number of bourgeois Blacks question and even put down the effectiveness of Black colleges. But without Black colleges there would be no Black elite. Certainly, there wasn't anyone from the White colleges beating down the door to educate Black folks. As a matter of fact, they only allowed us to start attending White colleges in the late '60s to early '70s.

Three generations after the Civil War, the combined efforts of the Black church, African-American professional associations and a few liberal White churches (Presbyterian, Methodist Episcopal, Congregationalist and Quaker) organized a network of higher education institutions for producing the core

occupations of the Black elite — scholars, clergy, lawyers, doctors, dentists, scientists, technicians, administrators, etc.

Over 95 percent of the earliest Black elite who were college-educated members emanated from Black colleges. In 1930, there were over 18,000 college educated African-Americans. Today, the majority of Black doctors, lawyers, dentists, journalists, nurses, scientists, engineers, etc. are from Black colleges. Xavier, Southern and Howard University have graduated the highest number of Black doctors in the United States, and that still stands as of this writing.

We have to avoid brainwashed thinking that the "White man's ice is colder" and that if you aren't educated at a desegregated school, you don't have a quality education because the White man's education is better.

By 1890, teachers were (See LaGrande, Page 11)

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