

OUR VIEW Keep Hands Off

The economy has delivered a roundhouse kick to nearly every section of American life. Nowhere is this more evident, and potentially disastrous, as in public education. Across the country and right here in Nevada, public education officials have been forced to cut tens of millions of dollars from their budgets.

A superintendent of a financially struggling school district in Ohio has gone so far as to ask the federal government to steer some funds from the \$700 billion economic bailout package to his school district. Olmsted Falls Superintendent Todd Hoadley said schools should be able to petition the government for assistance, just as the Big 3 automakers in Detroit and cities like Atlanta, Phoenix and Philadelphia have.

"I feel a moral obligation to our taxpayers to make this attempt," Hoadley, who requested \$100 million from the Treasury Department last week, told the Associated Press. "This is a legitimate request. I'll be frankly disappointed if something positive doesn't come out of this."

It might be wise for the Clark County School District join Hoadley in seeking help. Perhaps a groundswell of support from school districts across the country could turn the tide. After all, the youth are our most important resource and, in order to compete in this 21st century global economy, America's next leaders must have access to the best books, equipment, facilities and teachers.

Our perpetually underfunded and cash-strapped school district has already performed financial surgery, cutting \$133 million in response to Gov. Jim Gibbons request for all state agencies to whittle their budgets to the bone. The district has done this by shelving the expansion of full-day kindergarten, programs for the academically gifted and students struggling with proficiency exams and halting the expansion of empowerment schools.

And it's still not enough. Gov. "No New Taxes" Gibbons wants more cuts—\$25 million to \$75 million worth.

This has many parents and students worried that vital and viable programs are in jeopardy. Cutting district-funded sports programs would save \$6.28 million, according to the district. Increasing class sizes by one student from the 1st through the 12th graders would save more than \$32 million. Eliminating computing specialists would save \$18.1 million; cutting literacy specialists yields \$17 million in savings; and doing away with special education facilitators spares \$12.8 million.

This is shameful. No school district can expect to produce when faced with such difficulties. At two recent parent meetings organized by the CCSD, parents and students weighed in on the programs that should be spared. Most favored keeping sports (which cost \$6.2 million), extracurricular programs (\$5.2 million) and librarians (\$9.5 million). They approved of cutting empowerment schools (\$1.6 million), eliminating literacy specialists, shutting down one of the district's regions (\$2.6 million) and not offering early retirement incentives (\$2.5 million).

One idea that's been floated and should be deflated is instituting pay-to-play in sports. The very youth who often benefit most are those from poor families. Many of the written comments attest to the importance of making sports available and free: "Gives students from struggling families opportunity for educational advancement"; "[It's] vital to children's health and wellness," and "Keeps them off the streets and possibly out of gangs."

Extracurricular programs also are important, according to respondents: "Music helps in math and science." "Fine arts and band programs set up students to interact with each other and to build skills that will help focus them in school and work." "These magnet programs saved my son. It gave him self-esteem, a focus."

The harsh reality is that these desperate economic times call for desperate measures. We'd like to see no cuts to education. But it appears that our governor—hell bent on maintaining his pledge of no new taxes in hopes of riding it to re-election—isn't giving us any choice. So if cuts must be made, they should be done to cause the least damage. All voices should be heard on this issue, therefore, it's important for you to attend the Dec. 11 school board meeting. The future of education here depends on it.



How will Obama tackle AIDS?

By Phill Wilson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Dec. 1 was World AIDS Day and I'm thinking about President-elect Barack Obama.

As a 52-year-old Black gay man with HIV, I have many reasons to welcome the inauguration of Barack Obama. A big one is that an Obama administration has enormous potential to reinvigorate a struggle that has been allowed to flag over the last eight years: our national fight against HIV/AIDS.

With our country facing so many national challenges—two wars, a financial meltdown, and the growing threat of environmental devastation—it may be tempting to relegate the AIDS epidemic to the lower rung of national priorities.

Yet, that would be a grave mistake. Every year, more than 56,000 people in this country contract HIV.

The devastation is worst among Black Americans, who represent nearly half of all new HIV infections, including two-thirds of the new cases among women and 70 percent of the new cases among adolescents.

AIDS clearly has affected Black folks more than others. But as Sen. Obama said in 2006: "We are all sick because of AIDS—and we are all tested by this crisis. It is a test not only of our willing-



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ness to respond, but of our ability to look past the artificial divisions and debates that have often shaped that response."

AIDS, in short, is a sickness at the very heart of the American family. Like any family, America must respond to the sickness in its midst by displaying both solidarity for those who are living with HIV and a determination to make sure no one else gets infected.

We cannot relegate the AIDS fight to the government alone, not even with President Obama at the helm. So, here are several high-priority actions that Americans and our new government, together, should immediately take to reinvigorate our fight against HIV/AIDS:

—Support efforts to develop a national AIDS strategy.

The U.S. government requires all foreign countries that receive assistance from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

(PEPFAR) to have a national strategy to respond to HIV/AIDS. Shockingly, America has no national strategy for its own epidemic.

President-elect Obama has committed to put in place a national AIDS strategy. However, communities affected by AIDS—not bureaucrats—must drive the development of this strategy.

—Partner with the Obama administration to strengthen HIV prevention.

HIV prevention accounts for a paltry 4 percent of total spending by the federal government on domestic HIV/AIDS programs. That's an outrage.

The Obama administration must make good on its campaign promise to strengthen national prevention efforts. Yet, when opposition surfaces to needle exchange or school-based HIV

prevention programs, we must speak out and persuade decision-makers that true "family values" don't allow more HIV infections to occur when proven methods exist to prevent them.

The disproportionate vulnerability of Black gay men to HIV infection stems in no small part from the prevailing stigma associated with homosexuality. If we are serious about lowering the rate of new HIV infections, we must actively oppose stigma and promote acceptance in our churches, schools, and local communities.

—Make knowledge of HIV status a universal community norm.

The CDC estimates that more than one in five people living with HIV don't know they are infected. Such people are often diagnosed

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