
The People Have Spoken

Posted on May 22, 2009

By Paul Tran

Communications Director, Californians for Justice

Last Wednesday—six days before the May 19 Special Election—nearly a thousand students, parents, and teachers rallied for education in Sacramento, telling the Governor “Don’t Pink Slip Our Education!”

The gathering foreshadowed the people of California’s overall discontent with the state’s leadership. The results of the Not-So-Special Election can attest to that—All the propositions were soundly defeated, save Proposition 1F, which prevents state elected officials from receiving pay increases during budget deficit years, widely seen as a repudiation of the legislature’s leadership.

Essentially, the voters of California echoed the sentiments of the Campaign for Quality Education (CQE) that gathered in Sacramento last week.

Why do we have to balance the budget of the backs of our most vulnerable citizens, namely people with mental illness, children, and students? Why weren’t prisons or corrections on the ballot?

Scaring the electorate into voting for backroom brokered deals won’t work anymore.

And does anyone in Sacramento have a plan?

In lieu of a formal plan from the Governor and our legislature, the CQE came to the state capitol not only to march and rally, but to back progressive efforts at education reform as well.

Depending on what grim measure is used, California is somewhere between 47th and 50th in the nation in per-pupil funding. Assembly Concurrent Resolution 54 (Brownley, D-Santa Monica) resolves to bring those funding levels to at least the national average.

And it’s no secret that the students of color are the majority in California and almost half do not graduate from high school. Assembly Bill 8 (Brownley, D-Santa Monica) works towards budget transparency and funding the actual cost of educating California’s diverse student body, including first generation college students and English language learners.

But more than progressive legislation, the CQE wants what the rest of California wants: Direction and leadership from the Governor and Legislature, whose approval ratings are currently at historic lows, 33% and 14%, respectively. And no, calling this past Tuesday’s special election to re-direct political liabilities does not qualify as leadership.

In the long term, what we really want is a plan. It’s a simple request but once the Legislative Session begins, we all know about the paved road of good intentions. We want a budget process

that doesn't get locked up and delayed nearly every year. We want a long-term budget plan that can navigate the highs and lows of our ever cyclical, hyper economy.

And concerning education, we want an investment that will educate our students to thrive in the global economy of the 21st century. We want a plan that will fund all students in all zip codes so that they will be 100 percent prepared for college and careers. We want more qualified teachers, college prep courses, and counselors in our schools.

It's been said over and over, we need vision and imagination from our state leadership. A new bill here, a new policy there is nothing without political courage. What we really need is leadership that isn't constantly looking over its shoulder for the next re-election or open seat. (LBJ is a great example, in fact.)

And until these changes and plans are made, we'll keep coming back to Sacramento and making our voices heard. We enjoy the festive atmosphere of our rallies--the poetry of the students, the passion of the teachers, the support of our elected officials—but to be honest, we'd much rather be working in our local schools and communities.

Paul Tran is the Communications Director for Californians for Justice, which helps lead the Campaign for Quality Education, a statewide alliance working towards educational equity and racial justice in California public schools located in low-income, immigrant, communities of color. For more info, go to www.quality-education.org