



# Don't Pink Slip Our Education

## Education budget cuts protest activates one home-schooled cynic

News Report and Video, Silvano Pontoniere,

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Editor's Note: California's budget woes have not been unnoticed by frustrated students that descended on Sacramento to protest the proposed budget cuts to their education, inspiring one jaded reporter. Silvano Pontoniere, 17, is a content producer for YO! Youth Outlook Multimedia.

California, as mighty a state as it is, happens to have an extremely large budget deficit of \$24.3 billion. With such a heavy number, there are some very large budget cuts on the horizon, and California's education budget is supposed to suffer a heavy blow.

In May, nearly a thousand students rallied at city hall in Sacramento to protest these cuts, organized by Californians for Justice (CFJ) and Campaign for Quality Education (CQE), and I went to cover it.

I was embedded on a bus at with about 40 students and a handful of adults. We met in front of Oakland High School at 8 a.m. As I stood outside waiting to board the glorious bus in front of me, a man named Eli, a member of CFJ, explained to me that the crappy bus that they usually ride in wasn't working, so they had been automatically upgraded to a limo bus.

"It's funny cause we're gonna be riding up in a limo bus and asking for donations," he said with a chuckle.

We filed onto the bus, counted off, and were on our way. Before playing any music, the goals for the day were reviewed, and some chants were practiced. I ended up sitting on top of the subwoofer, so every time the bass hit, I vibrated. There was a big TV and a stripper pole in the back, but no stripper.

We arrived in Sacramento around 10 a.m., and quickly filed out. It was cramped on that bus, a couple of people didn't even have space to sit, and the ride was long. It was hot in Sacramento, about 85 degrees, so they dished out water bottles when we got off the bus.

When we got there the DJ had set up and already started playing music, and all the kids, parents, teachers and organizers were donning their t-shirts and registering. Every

part of California attending wore a different color of the same shirt. I can't seem to remember what color applied to where, except that Fresno wore brown, and Oakland, whom I arrived with, wore yellow. The crowd was impressive, to say the least, and diverse. Young and old, light and dark, there were all kinds of people there to protest the use of their tax dollars.

Originally, I went to this rally for one reason, and one reason only. I had been assigned to cover it, and accordingly had no choice. In fact, I really didn't care about the rally at all. I've never been to school in my life, I was homeschooled, so for me, everyone's plight wasn't really relatable. In fact, I grew up kind of opposed to the whole public schooling system, it was the reason my parents homeschooled me, so one could even say I didn't belong there. But I was there, and whether I liked it or not, the day wasn't gonna go any faster if I focused on the fact that I really couldn't relate to the cause that was being defended. I had a mission to complete, and a simple clash of opinion wasn't going to stop that. Then the speakers started.

As I said, I had come with little or no concern at all about the budget cuts, but as the speakers started, and I saw kids just like myself stepping up to plead their case, my opinion slowly changed. A boy from Orange County wearing skinny jeans, Vans and a plaid shirt came up and spoke about how he, the girl he was speaking with and everyone present deserved good, new school materials, and that OUR money, amid OUR taxes should be used to provide US with quality education. A Latina ex-teacher who had been pink-slipped came up and told us her sad story about how she had fallen victim to the cuts in education funding.

The time passed relatively quickly as I ran around trying to find a crack through the crowd gathered at the base of the steps, so I could get a good shot with my camera, and soon enough all the speakers had shared their sentiments, all the applauding and cheering had been released. I was beginning to see their side of things. If there are this many young people feeling neglected, then there's gotta be something wrong. I decided to give the rally a chance; maybe I did agree with them after all.

It was time for the march. The line stretched about two blocks long, with kids at the head carrying a banner that read "The Campaign For Quality Education", that had been on display behind the speakers during all of their segments. Other people carried personal signs that said "I want to be a (blank) when I grow up", the blank filled in with the carriers profession of choice.

"Ain't no power like the power of the youth, cause the power of the youth dont stop, SAY WHAAT!"

"Who's got the power? We got the power! What kind of power? Student power!"

"Se Puede? Si se puede!!"

Everyone had been given a piece of paper with all the chants on it at the beginning of the day, and I'm assuming rehearsed on their bus ride over as my group did. We marched along the sidewalk around City Hall, receiving encouraging shouts from pedestrians and passers-by. Trucks passing would sound their air horns, and every now and then a car would use their horn to provide rhythm for the chants. The voices were

being heard, in more ways than they knew. I had finally been swayed to their side of the argument.

It must have been the intense energy from the march that brought me over, and seeing so many young people - like myself - so invested in something they felt to be wrong and unjust, coming together and speaking out of their own accord.

And it IS wrong. We youngsters are told to go to school, otherwise we'll be locked up. But what happens when they start taking apart the system that they tell us we need to be a part of? What do they expect the outcome to be when they send such ridiculous mixed messages? Admittedly, I was raised against public schooling. I think it's messed up as it is, forcing kids to waste so much of their life learning almost nothing but the opinion of some random person who is "qualified" to teach, but this wasn't about whether or not I liked the system. And true, my family has always had some tax dollars go towards public schooling that we never saw anything for, but that was our own choice. Public schooling was always an option, and we chose not to take advantage of it, probably because there was no advantage to take, but nevertheless, that was of our own volition. Other people, however, who do want to take advantage of those tax dollars they're spending are finding out that they actually can't, and that's wrong. You can't tell someone they have to do something, and then take that something away so that they can't do it.

The march ended where it had started, at the steps of City Hall. Later, we climbed back on the buses and headed back to the Bay. The mood on the bus was one of victory, and accomplishment. They had come to send a message, and done so. Their goal had been achieved, and as a result positive energy ran amok.

California is looking to have education absorb \$4.8 billion of the budget's deficit, a hefty sum to say the least. That has more than 20,000 teachers looking at being laid off, which naturally would leave many students with teachers lost, which is of course an undesirable scenario. The large turnout in Sacramento well represented an extremely large group of people, young people, the future, who are greatly displeased with this news, and rightfully so. Many of us pay taxes expecting to be provided for with public schooling, and many people are feeling upset and betrayed by the large sum of money that is supposed to be taken from schooling.

The rally was a success, in the sense that the message was sent quite clearly: don't pink-slip our education. In addition, a large group of youth coming together, from all ends of the state, to make a positive impact on something, is any way you slice it a success. I'm glad I was assigned to cover the rally; I discovered a cause I didn't even know I believed in. What started as a chore for me ended as a personally enlightening experience.

As I said before, the feel was one of positive energy and hope, and everyone present seemed to be 100% behind their cause. The voice has been heard; now let's see if anyone listens.