

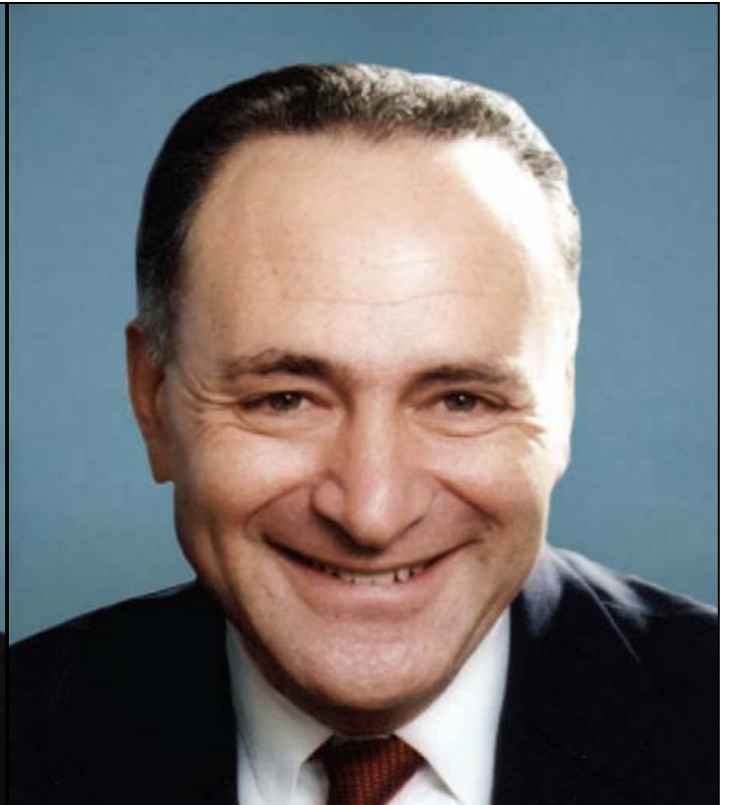
VC ECHOES

Volume 13, Issue 2

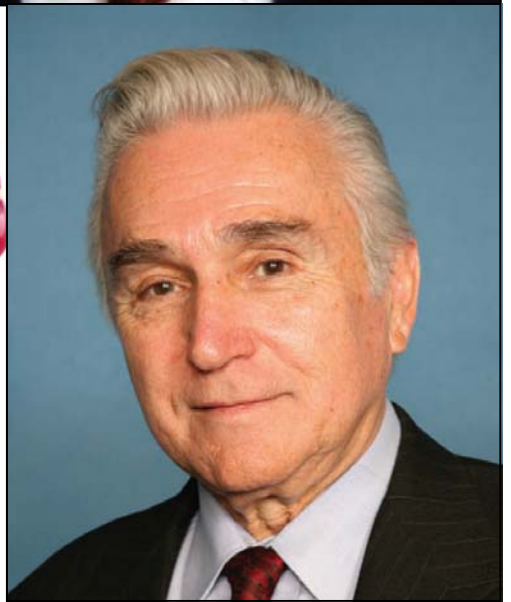
Valley Central Teachers' Association

November, 2010

NYSUT-ENDORSED CANDIDATES



Election Day is
Tuesday,
November 2nd



There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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Contribute to the December issue!
Articles or Contributions should be sent to Meghan Rilley, HS, by 18 November, 2010

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VC Echoes is a NYSUT and AFT Award-winning Publication!

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The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—Local 3076—and is published regularly during the school year. Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.

Escalating Attacks

During these months preceding the November 2nd elections, we have witnessed escalating attacks on public education, teachers and teacher unions. With regard to the latter, I find it somewhat conspicuous that many reports fail to reveal that states with strong and active teacher unions such as New York are the ones leading the nation with both innovation and results. Interestingly, right-to-work states that have effectively blocked union-organizing efforts along with the voices of workers within education are generally behind academically. In an attempt to justify these unjustified attacks on public education, the worst urban schools with the worst poverty and crime rates are factored into the comparison formula. Recently, gubernatorial candidate Andrew Cuomo threw out a statistic that indicated that New York State was ranked 40th out of 50 states with regard to education results. He chose to not disclose the origins of this inflammatory statement. My suspicion is that his statistic is referring to New York's SAT results which rank at about this level to the uninformed. However, over a decade ago, a Harvard study found that New York State actually ranked first when student/family sociodemographic factors are considered along with the number of students who actually take the exam. Cuomo's failure to clarify the source of his statistics provides one of many obvious reasons behind the lack of endorsement for any of the gubernatorial candidates this year.

Education Nation, one of the more recent forums for anti-public education rhetoric was a one-sided sneak attack organized by NBC that would have made FOX News proud. The Education Nation panel of experts consisted of charter school owners and employees (public schools apparently did not need a voice and were excluded by these objective non-partisan reporters—shame on you Brian Williams). During these "discussions," a young charter school teacher aggressively stated (*cont'd on pg 3*)

Escalating Attacks (from page 2)

that the teachers' union was standing in her way by hindering her ability to service her students by preventing her from staying after school each day. I have never worked with a local teacher union that prevented its members from putting in extra hours for the good of the children. In fact, this union president comes in before the official school day for test reviews all throughout the school year. It is impossible to get the "job" done effectively without putting in extra hours. This Education Nation/Charter School employee has made a typical rookie mistake. She has misinterpreted the union leadership's protection of her right to leave the building at the end of the work day as a directive to leave (We can be confident that a ten hour administratively mandated work day would eventually lead to her enlightenment). Furthermore, my personal experiences/observations over 25 years have convinced me that those who most disdain unionism are generally the last ones to arrive in the morning and the first ones out the door at the conclusion of the official work day, while those most appreciative of union protection are the ones that generally go above-and-beyond on a daily basis, including voluntarily extending their work days to help students.

A charter school owner in Oakland recently touted his school as an innovative model for others to follow. Naturally, he believes he should receive more funding and other schools should follow his lead. And, of course, some of our less educationally literate news programs/reporters are amazed and awestruck by his miraculous success. There are, however, some clear advantages that this charter school has over its public school counterparts in Oakland—this charter school gets to pick which students it will service. It would also be true to state that this charter school selects poor children, which may at first seem to create an equal playing field for comparative analysis with the rest of the Oakland City School System. However, selecting only poor children who are eager to learn and whose parents are eager for them to learn creates a huge advantage for the charter school. Conveniently, failure of parents to attend periodic teacher/parent conferences at this Oakland charter school results in the expulsion of the student. Goodness...charter schools have essentially eliminated mandated education on a limited basis for their own benefits. If charter schools had a statue of "education liberty" its slogan would be "give us your students who are eager to learn and whose parents care enough to get involved...all others be damned...let the public

schools deal with them."

The press is selecting from among the most successful charter schools for comparison against only the worst public schools. The truth is that public schools overwhelmingly outperform charter schools when fair comparisons are made—although fair is almost impossible since charter schools have historically been exempt from the mandates and rules imposed on public schools. Why do charter school advocates insist upon comparing their handpicked, mandate-exempt schools to the worst performing, poverty-stricken, city neighborhood schools instead of, for example, a typical Orange County school? The answer is obvious...they would lose. I propose that we exchange staff members between the charter and public school that is being compared to see how that would impact results. The charter school teachers who would now be forced to teach all children that showed up at their classroom doors regardless of attitude or family support would likely run for the hills and the public school teachers would finally have that idealistic classroom that we were all told about in college.

Having stated all of the above, it is important to restate that public schools (i.e. those schools that do not get to choose their students) generally outperform charter schools. One charter school reported a 100% graduation rate—embarrassing its public school counterparts with this impressive statistic. What was not reported was that this represented only 13 graduates that remained in this model school out of 150 that originally enrolled; therefore, their graduation rate, if held to the same standards as public schools, was only 8%. Our graduation rate at VC is over 80% and we accomplish this while servicing all children within our borders. This number, however, could certainly rise to 100% if we were permitted to do what charter schools do. According to Diane Ravitch, data demonstrates that only 1 in 6 charter schools (16%) perform better than their public school counterparts—that means that 84% of charter schools fail to fulfill their purpose (<http://www.dianeravitch.com/speeches.html>). I am proud of the gains we have made in education with very little support for the many unfunded mandates that are forced upon us each year. Our success is supported by valid statistics that include all children. The upcoming election in November is important to public education and our students. Education is the key to improving our economy. It is important that we invest in the one area that will create both knowledge and jobs. Please consider the future of education when you vote!

—Tim Brown, HS, President, VCTA

Anti-Incumbency Attitudes

The concept and reality of lifetime politicians makes many of us squirm with discomfort and frustration from time to time. Incumbents have some advantages when running for reelection and often appear to be more interested in retaining their positions than in doing right by their constituents. The danger with any anti-incumbency movement is that proven elected officials tend to get lumped with bad ones. Voting without thought is as problematic as not voting—with the key issue being “without thought.” How many Americans vote party line without really considering who and/or what they are really voting for? How many Americans could describe in detail what the candidate they voted for really stands for?

Americans have a tendency to be politically impatient with long-term-memory-disorder. Why hasn't this financial problem been fixed already—it has been almost two years? News Flash: God couldn't fix this our current financial crisis in two years...and with the partisan politics that permeate every aspect of our political system, I think God would refuse to accept the challenge of fixing our current financial crisis knowing that s/he would have to deal with two political parties that have lost their ways.

If we look at “real history,” it would be recognized that party politics have always been myopic. I believe that both the Democratic and Republican parties would do anything to be in power, even if that meant compromising the nation and people they claim to love and serve. Some of this originates from a sense of moral superiority and some of this

originates simply from greed and a desire for power. NOTE: This does not mean that all members of each party are self-serving. There are elected officials in both parties that are working hard to transform our current two-party narcissistic political nightmare into a more altruistic process. But in today's world of sound-bites and partisan reporting, how does one distinguish between selfish and selfless?

This election is important to education (as are all elections). RTTT mandates, new APPR requirements, charter schools and initiatives to call an early NYS Constitutional Convention that would potentially take away current pension/retirement rights for public employees should encourage all of us to be more thoughtful voters in this upcoming election. Some incumbents who have nearly perfect voting records on education issues are in danger of losing votes, not because they have voted “incorrectly” on our issues, but because they are being lumped into the “throw the bums out” fever that is gaining momentum. I wonder how we would feel as a staff if we inherited the worst performing school in the state and were told that we would all be fired if we did not get all of the students to be proficient within two years—even a four or six year turn-around would likely be an unrealistic expectation.

Please vote on November 2nd. Please know the truth behind each candidate's sound-bites. Please consider candidates who support public education and have been endorsed by NYSUT through a process that includes input from all locals.

—Tim Brown, HS, President, VCTA

NYSUT Endorsements 2010 Elections: (listed by District if applicable)

US Senate

- Charles Schumer
- Kirsten Gillibrand
- 88: Amy Paulin
- 91: George Latimer
- 92: Thomas Abinanti
- 93: Mike Spano
- 94: Kenneth Zebrowski
- 95: Ellen Jaffee
- 97: Annie Rabbitt
- 98: Aileen Gunther
- 99: Brendan Tully
- 101: Kevin Cahill

House of Representatives

- 16: Jose Serrano
- 17: Eliot Engel
- 18: Nita Lowey
- 19: John Hall
- 20: Scott Murphy
- 21: Paul Tonko
- 22: Maurice Hinchey

NYS Comptroller

- Thomas Dinapoli

NYS Senate

- 35: Andrea Stewart-Cousins
- 36: Ruth Hassell-Thompson
- 37: Suzi Oppenheimer
- 38: David Carlucci
- 40: Mike Kaplowitz
- 43: Roy McDonald

NYS Assembly

- 86: Hector Ramirez
- 87: Gary Pretlow



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