

VC ECHOES

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Valley Central Teachers' Association

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YEAR IN REVIEW: 2011



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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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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.

APPR Changes

On May 16, the NYS governor decided to ignore the APPR law that was legislated last spring and push through his own version. Across the state, educators were trying to understand the changes legislated and sought direction from State Ed on the implementation of the requirements. The governor's version is more disconcerting and comes with even less direction than last year's law. This new version doubles the amount that test scores count and places emphasis on student growth without explaining how to do this with special education students or gifted students. It gives no guidance on how it will be fair. How will it measure the heart you bring to your job or the love that you show for your students?

—Patti Lunden, VCTA VP, HS

The US Economy

The following is a summary and partial transcript of the Daily Show's Interview of Fareed Zakaria, author of *"The Post-American World, Release 2.0,"* that aired on June 7, 2011.

The USA is still the largest economy in the world. American corporations are doing fantastic; they have access to great technology, cheap capital and cheap labor in various parts of the world. The stock market is up (85% at the time of this interview). However, the average American worker's fate is in a very different place. American workers are stuck in the US; they are not mobile like corporations and their wages have been flat for ten years. Corporate capital is mobile—most American citizens are not.

Technology and globalization have changed the world for the American worker. Seven million Americans are officially unemployed, but twenty-four million Americans are unemployed or underemployed. The Republicans are again proposing more tax-cuts for corporations. But is it a fool's errand to believe that we can create conditions in the US that are as conducive for corporations as exist in India and China? Americans will not and should not live like those workers; Americans have earned their middle class status. How does cutting corporate taxes bring those jobs back? Americans simply cannot compete with those conditions (i.e. cheap labor) and corporations will continue to eke out every penny of profit that they legally can, regardless of the impact on the American worker. It's about profit; it has always been about profit, but the profit is much greater overseas.

Cutting budgets in the short terms means laying-off school teachers, firefighters, police, etc. The perception is that this creates a leaner and meaner government, but whatever the long-term projections might be, in the short term this means more people will be unemployed. Fewer people will go to the Mall and diners; therefore, fewer people will be investing in the economy. Although European countries are also struggling,

some are weathering the economic storm better than the US.

How has Germany managed to retain its manufacturing capacity even though it

has lots of regulations and unions? The primary difference seems to be that the German people view their government in a more positive light due to investments in areas such as technology, science, technical institutes and apprenticeship programs. German government actively works on ways to positively grow the economy in conjunction with a competitive private sector economy, which includes a close evaluation of regulations.

The US currently has no coherent domestic manufacturing or labor policy. The US is trying to increase exports but it is difficult to talk about what government can do positively when there is so much corruption in the system. We certainly need to make a more regulatory-friendly and tax-friendly environment for business, but this does not mean that government mandated and/or sponsored programs are all bad. For example, Silicon Valley was made by a great state education system, a great public education system and defense department demand for engineers. At one time the US government bought virtually every computer chip that was manufactured at Silicon Valley.

NOTE: Another television show I was watching regarding Chinese manufacturing indicated that China has allowed American auto manufacturers to set up factories but have mandated that 90% of the automobile components be made in China. This ensures that the automobile is both made and assembled in China. I realize that the solution to our problems in America is more complex than this. *(continued on page 4)*



The Educational Apocalypse

While everyday is interesting to be a teacher, Friday, May 20, 2011 was an especially interesting day to be a high school teacher. By my third period class talk of the imminent end of the world on May 21st—and subsequent zombie apocalypse—had gone viral. No matter what the Madeline Hunter planned lesson said, zombies were a topic of discussion. One junior, a girl named Stacia, was pretty freaked out—not about the end of the world, but by the possibility of zombies eating her brains the next day. So to calm her down, we googled “zombie apocalypse” together and to our horror the Center for Disease Control webpage popped up. Surreal but true, the CDC had a page on how to survive a zombie apocalypse. Like other CDC pages, it recommended having a family meeting place and an emergency kit although there was no talk of twinkies or double-tap or making it out to Bill Murray’s house. But it was pretty strange to think that a government agency like the CDC had such a page posted. Needless to say, Stacia was no calmer about the zombie apocalypse.

When I reflect on this past year in education, it makes me think of the zombie apocalypse...surreal. With the beating teachers (and our brothers and sisters in public service throughout the country) have been taking this year, it is hard to bear in mind that “during this past school year, great teaching took place in every school, in every district in the country” (Alan Blankstein). And it wasn’t the result of top-down, punitive education “reform” measures.

“Too much of the reform discussion has been a witch-hunt,” Blankstein says. “The dialogue in the country right now is horrific. You would think our public schools have ceased to function, but good work is being done across the country” (<http://neatoday.org/2011/06/13/the-answer-is-in-the-room>). Blankstein is the founder of HOPE Foundation (Harnessing

Optimism and Potential through Education) which works with schools, unions, community organizations, and business leaders to design and implement strategies to turn around low-performing schools, close achievement gaps within and between schools district-wide, and sustain overall success. It is hopeful just to know that such an organization exists these days!

Blankstein has written a book, The Answer is in the Room, which basically posits that the answer must come from those of us already in the room. This seems to be the only answer to overcoming the educational apocalypse that is upon us. We need to continue to speak up and speak out and realize that while our instinct is to close the door and teach, we still need to make legislators understand that we are the experts on education, not them.

On May 23, Stacia was happy to show back up to class with no zombie apocalypse and we were able to get back to our curriculum. Hopefully we will be able to say the same soon regarding this educational apocalypse—it will be over and we will be able to get back to our curriculum.

—Patti Lunden, VCTA, VP, HS

US Economy (from pg 3)

However, I fear the only solution that will please some Wall Street elite is the creation of a nation of US peasants; this might bring corporations home. But what a scam...reread the first paragraph from the interview with John Stewart and Fareed Zakaria...the US is the largest economy in the world and US corporations are the richest in the world. I would like to remind each of you that two-thirds of American corporations pay no taxes and that corporate taxes are at an all-time low.

—Tim Brown, VCTA President, HS

Tribal Warfare

Tribal warfare continues to shake our empire at its very foundations. Gun fire and other forms of violence, although currently held in check due solely to a strong public law enforcement presence, is a constant threat that tempers many citizens' willingness to speak freely in this presumably open society. Whatever happened to government *by* and *for* the people?

Government officials cannot be exclusively blamed for ignoring the concept of "*government for the people*" while using their positions to promote personal agendas. Though the masses are responsible for "*government by the people*," a disturbing proportion of the tribal masses have unfortunately chosen to vote with their emotions, without the aid of their brains. Tribal leaders are aware of this voter predisposition and have developed political procedures that take advantage of this impulsive and misdirected support.

The Mammoth Tribe has gained some influence and power recently as a result of its finely tuned political strategies. Its tactics have been brilliant in a time of instability and tribal-centrism. Refusing to accept responsibility for its contributions to our current crisis while simultaneously convincing the tribal masses that everyone else is at fault has been an ingeniously implemented scheme. The Mammoth Tribe's primary tactic of running over everyone in its path with opposing views would make some of the more physically violent Darfur brethren proud.

The Burro Tribe, once composed primarily of working class peasants, has tried to adapt some of the Mammoths' more successful tactics after having lost some of its previous influence among the various tribes. Unfortunately, the Burro Tribe's future looks bleak as its primary battle ploy is hindering their rapid adaptation to the new types of modern warfare needed to win over or manipulate the tribal masses. The Burro Tribe's tactics consist of passive-aggressive assaults with daily defensive retreats. Burros often hide underground in the hopes that the Mam-

moths will go away. Unfortunately for the Burros, Mammoths can recognize cowardice and are further emboldened by these retreats.

Elected tribal leaders, known as Venals, continue to get rich by catering to Pecuniary Overlords. These Overlords continue to control Carnal Canal on the wealthy island Port of Mad Hatter. It is understood among the tribes that control of the tribal masses and, therefore, control of the Empire will rest in the hands of whichever tribe can best serve the wants and needs of the Pecuniary Overlords that covet their "precious" canal and its economic influence more than anything in the world, including personal ethics.

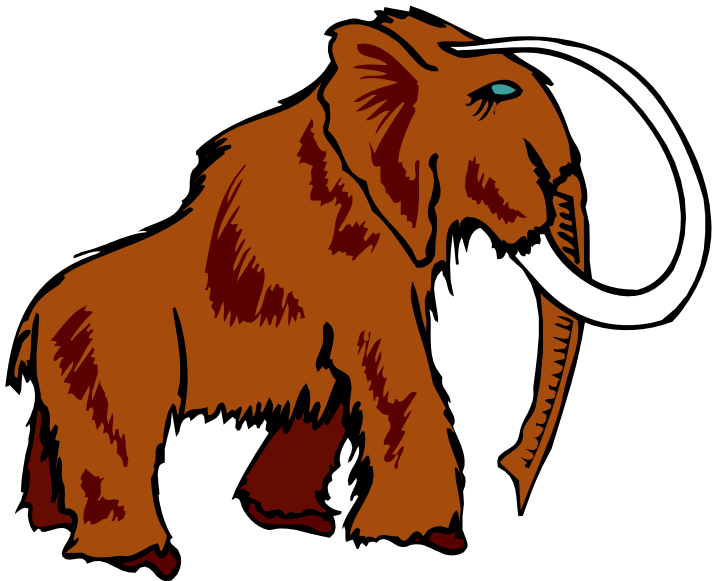
The Mammoth Tribe, in an attempt to increase its power base, has recently aligned itself with the Spiritual Taliban. This self-righteous tribe generally consists of piously intolerant fanatics who believe they have a monopoly on God's will. It is important that these zealots not be mistaken for normal spiritual tribespeople who are generally tolerant of a variety of tribal customs and beliefs. The Spiritual Taliban often use and combine words like "*Faith*" and "*Freedom*" as a front to disguise its real objective—control, power and tax evasion. The implication that true freedom can only come to fruition if all tribes adapt the Spiritual Taliban's perception of God's will has been utilized in a multitude of cultures throughout the world, inevitably leading to a loss of rights for infidels or non-believers, the poor and, of course, women.

The Empire's fate is yet to be determined. Could the unthinkable happen here? Could tribal warfare escalate into physical violence? Could tribal warfare lead to the decline and fall of the Empire? The uncomfortable truth is that tribal warfare takes many forms; however, it always begins with political, economic, ethnic, gender or religious oppression. Furthermore, economic crashes and high unemployment rates often precede these types of oppressive historical trends. *(continued on pg 6)*

Tribal Warfare (from page 5)

Spiritual zealots and narcissistic entrepreneurs often step forward with promises of simple fixes while selecting specific scapegoats to satisfy the tribes' needs for retribution against what is usually an imaginary foe. It is our responsibility to avoid this fate. It is our responsibility to remain true to what is right—to hold on to altruistic patterns of behavior in the face of tremendous tribal pressure to do otherwise. This task, however, will be difficult for all of us if we do not recognize the Mammoths, Burros, Pecuniary Overlords, Venals and Spiritual Taliban for what they are—generally divisive and self-serving.

Tribal warfare is alive and well in this Empire. These tribal conflicts have not reached Darfur or Bosnia levels of violent extremism due to strong public institutions that have generally restricted this warfare to philosophical/political forums. However, tribespeople need only remember the history of the Salem Witch Trials, McCarthyism, Japanese Internment Camps, slavery, segregation and the fight for women's suffrage to understand how precarious our perceptual peace really is. —*Tim Brown, VCTA President*



Index of Tribal Terms

Spiritual Taliban—often intolerant fanatics who believe they have a monopoly on God's will.

Mammoth—one of two influential tribes; tactics are to run over everyone in their paths that do not agree with them; heavily aligned with Spiritual Taliban.

Burros—one of two influential tribes; tactics are passive-aggressive with daily defensive retreats; often hide underground in the hopes that the Mammoths will go away.

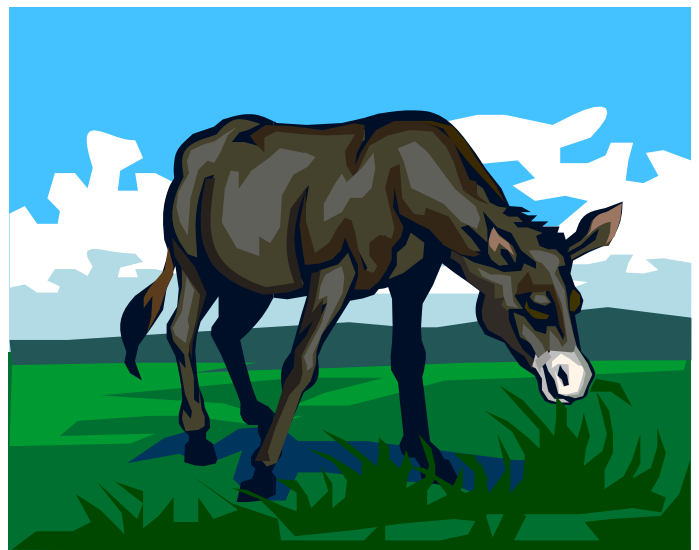
Pecuniary Overlords—live on Carnal Canal on the island Port of Mad Hatter.

Pecuniary—consisting of or measured in money

Carnal Canal—Wall Street

Port of Mad Hatter—Manhattan

Venals—willing to sell one's influence, especially in return for a bribe.



Mac's Musings (from the Retiree Side)...

Another school year has come to a close—and a new opening in the next act of their lives for VC's retirees of 2011. As said before, we welcome them to our ranks and wish them joy in this new and exciting time.

To our active teachers, a note of thanks for once again fighting the good fight in imparting knowledge and wisdom to our young people, your students. In this day and age, when you are expected to do more with less, you once again have shown yourselves to be men and women for others. You are to be commended.

I continue to be amazed at our nation and state as they mandate more for schools while taking away aid. The fact that politicians are calling the shots for education is a travesty.

—Some reminders for all retirees...

—If you have any changes in age, address, status, etc., make sure that you inform Central Office so that you receive all benefits.

—It is that time of year when I begin to think about the Retiree Luncheon. I have some mixed feelings since we were down to seventy attendees. I'll be in touch with a Summer Musings with any arrangements for a luncheon. Our date is usually the Wednesday after Labor Day which usually had been the first day of classes.

—Remember that you can now get ECHOES on the VCTA website. I know that many of you prefer the paper edition, and I'll bring it up again.

—Amen!

—I am grateful once again to the officers and executive committee members for being aware of the concerns of retirees. Also my thanks to Arline Friedman for serving with me on the executive committee and for her concern for her

fellow retirees; and to Orin Segall for keeping me abreast of retiree concerns.

—And to all of you who read these musings. You (all VC folk) have a very big place in my life—Thanks!

—And (as always in this space) Good Night, Mrs. Calibash, wherever you are!!

—Finally, until we meet again, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.



—Mac
(AKA Kevin
McFadden)

*Retiree
Representative and
Beloved
Scribe*

 * Be on the lookout *
 * for your *
 * Summer Musings!! *

 * New Retirees: *
 * Remember to Visit *
 * www.vcta.net *
 * to view the latest *
 * edition of the *
 * VC ECHOES! *

Summer, Summer, Summertime!!

Summer is here at last! After running around manically for ten straight months, teachers can finally relax, rest, and recharge their batteries to gear up for next year's crop of students. Well, at least for the first day or two.

Soon enough, teachers begin to reflect even more deeply on their instructional practice, consider how to maximize efficiency in their management and procedures, and plan new ways to motivate and engage their learners. This reflective time is particularly crucial to education in its current state.

Considering the attacks that public education has endured over the past couple of years, Valley Central has done a great job of minimizing the impact of cuts on the students. Despite these efforts, our kids will unfortunately still feel the aftershocks of New York State's willful failure to support its schools.

Teachers are the last line of defense for our students. Looking around at our colleagues in these waning days of the year, we may often envision Rocky Balboa after his match with Ivan

Drago in the classic *Rocky IV* (I'm sorry, I love this nationalist movie, drenched in Cold War politics). We may feel bruised, battered, and beaten—yet still dedicated, determined, and devoted to our cause.

This resiliency is essential to serving our pupils in the face of adversity. Education in New York State, and indeed the United States in general, will continue to suffer assaults from all sides for the foreseeable future. The key is to channel our inner Rocky Balboa and get back up time after time, punch after punch.

Summer affords us a much-needed period in which to regroup, rejuvenate, and refocus. Enjoy the well-deserved respite! See you in September!

—Meghan Riley, HS, Soc. St.

