

the “Peace Party” he proposes is more “Peace” Party, with “peace” being a shift from large scale ground wars to more economical drone strikes and special operations-driven occupations. Of course, Hayden predicts, there will be an argument “over the question of whether special operations and drone attacks are effective, moral and consistent with the standards of a constitutional democracy,” but is there any real doubt how that argument will end?

The notion of Obama declaring a “trillion dollar peace dividend” which he will then (why worry over constitutional authority mid-fantasy?) “transfer ... to energy conservation and America’s state and local crises,” is nonsense rooted in the durability of “9/11 Blindness.” The myth of 9/11 has established the premises of the game, and as long as you play their game, you’re never going to win.

*Tim Shaw
Eugene*

MARKETABLE SKILLS

In response to the president’s urging of citizens to share their ideas for improving our economy, I offer a modest proposal for addressing the high level of unemployment among young people and especially young people who are part of the minority community where the unemployment rate is double the 9 percent rate for the workforce as a whole.

As a recipient of a Fulbright, I taught economics during the 1983-84 academic year at a college in England. At that time the British government was trying to deal with a similar high unemployment rate facing young people here in the U.S.

Briefly, the concept of their plan was to take such people off the dole by dealing with what we in economics call structural unemployment. This means that many young people lacked the needed marketable skills and job experience to be employed by businesses. The plan they used could be used here and was simply to have the government pay a percentage

of their wages if business would agree to hire them for two years and give them a day off to attend the British Colleges of Higher Education such as the one at which I taught monetary economics to such banking students. The theory was that at the end of two years the students would have marketable skills and two years of work experience.

I think that if it worked there, it should be considered here.

*G. Dennis Shine
Springfield*

SUPPORT FOR JOBS

As a lifelong Democrat, I was surprised to read of Congressman Peter DeFazio’s belief that support for President Obama is waning in the 4th congressional district. Please allow me to share some good reasons for my strong support for Obama:

1) Obamacare. Although some people don’t understand what will happen in the next few years, the result will be more, not less, medically insured Americans.

This will be a very good event for all of us. 2) The wind down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both of these wars are now unnecessary and a drain on resources both human and financial that we need elsewhere. 3) Employment. I am a professor at a local private college and personally observe how much struggle my students engage in to find a job after graduation. Obama is the highest ranking federal politician who has publicly announced and supported a jobs program at the federal level that will bring a rising tide that will cause everyone’s boat to rise. For these and many other reasons, Obama deserves reelection.

*Gerry Merritt
Eugene*

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THE CLASS WAR FROM ABOVE BY GORDON LAFER

Child Neglect

Warehousing kids in our public schools

If you want to see the future of education, head to the nearby town of Lowell. Lowell’s elementary school has 20 to 30 kids per grade and, until this year, one teacher per grade. But over the summer, Lowell fired half its teachers, so now the remaining three are teaching two grades each. Each pair of classrooms is separated by a 12 ft. wide storeroom, with new “windows” cut into both its walls. Teachers are supposed to lead one class while peering through the holes in the walls to keep an eye on the rest of their charges, two rooms away. The teacher-less room is staffed by an educational assistant – doubtless dedicated, but not certified, nor even required to have a college degree.

The Lowell windows are probably illegal. Oregon law mandates a minimum number of instructional hours for each student. Since you can’t really teach by peeking through holes in the walls, Lowell may be violating state law, cheating its students of half the instruction time they’re entitled to.

But the worst crime is having kids literally warehoused for half the day, trying to get attention or ask a question of someone who is running between rooms managing 50 to 60 kids. In Portland, where elementary schools face up to 30 kids per class, teachers say they’re cutting back on writing assignments, grading only some homework, and demonstrating science experiments instead of giving kids hands-on experience. And everywhere, bigger classes mean less individual attention, more behavioral problems, and more kids falling behind. How much worse will it be in Lowell, where the student-teacher ratio is now double that of Portland?

In nearby McKenzie, teachers are offering to forego cost-of-living adjustments and take seven furlough days – amounting to a 4 percent pay-cut – in order to free up enough money to reinstate one teaching position. All they’re asking is to keep their health insurance payments unchanged; teachers

now pay up to \$6,600 per year for insurance, and the district wants to add another \$800 on top of that. The total cost of the teachers’ proposal is \$11,000. But the district is playing hardball. “The district has repeatedly told us that they refuse to bring back the cut teaching hours unless we pay an additional \$11,000 in insurance premiums,” explains teacher and union President Lane Tompkins. “Even when we offered to compromise, they refused.”

The ultimate source of budget problems are Republicans in Salem who insist it’s preferable to have crowded schools than to take back any of the generous tax cuts for the rich.

Yet there always seems to be enough money for those at the top. According to the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, McKenzie Superintendent Sally Storm’s salary is the second-highest of any small district superintendent, at \$117,000. Storm says she deserves the pay because she doubles as high school principal; but a majority of comparable districts have no high school principal. Moreover, Storm recently created a “dean of students” position that assumed much of the principal’s duties – yet her pay did not decrease when that position was established. And while demanding teachers pay more for their insurance, Storm doesn’t pay a dime for hers. Storm could solve the entire district problem by reducing her salary to a mere \$105,000 – still with free health insurance! It’s to avoid this unbearable fate that Storm is threatening to force McKenzie kids into larger classes with fewer teachers.

To get quality administrators, we’re told, we need to pay top dollar. What then, do we need to do to get quality teachers?

Ooh - I know! Me in the back, with the Perry 2012 T-shirt! The way to ensure quality education is to cut teachers’ salaries and remind them they can be fired at any time. Is that right?

No, moron, that’s not right.

Those opposed to teachers’ unions always want us to remember our worst experiences. Did I have shitty teachers I wished could have been fired? Sure. Mr. Bullock, eighth grade shop class. Asshole. Miss Lee, fourth grade fascist. The condescending biology guy who ridiculed slow kids. But if the principals could have chosen to fire whoever they wanted, you really think they would make the same choices as me? No. All the people I hated would still be there. Like bosses everywhere, they would have chosen to keep the people loyal to them, and gotten rid of the upstarts.

In a recent survey, 92 percent of executives reported that promotions are often made on the basis of personal favoritism rather than professional qualifications. Duh. School is no different from other workplaces. The opposite of tenure is not merit – it’s favoritism. Who stays are all the ass-kissers.

I also remember the few remarkable teachers. Their ability to stand out from the crowd was made possible, in part, by having tenure and a union. To mentor kids and give them the confidence to explore the world requires having the time and emotional energy to think through the peculiarities of each specific set of kids you’re responsible for. It also requires taking risks to move beyond factory textbooks to awaken kids’ curiosity. Teachers facing oversized classes, crammed schedules and personal financial stress don’t have the reserves to tailor lesson plans to the particular makeup of each class. And people without job security don’t take risks.

As a group of McKenzie parents recently explained, while calling on the district to settle the teachers’ insurance needs, “We have put our hearts and resources into our children since the day they were born. We now share this path with their teachers, who we fully believe have their best interests in mind. We know that our teachers, as with anybody, can only carry a great burden so long until they give out.”

Gordon Lafer says these stories were brought to his attention by teachers and by his wife, who works for the teachers’ union representing Lowell, McKenzie and 10 other school districts. Lafer is a professor at the UO’s Labor Education and Research Center, and a research associate with the Economic Policy Institute.