

We should all rally with teachers May 1

I've been listening to the "back and forth" about the planned teacher rally this Wednesday and there are good points being made by both sides.

Sadly, teachers have learned from cohorts in other states that the best way to get the attention of and action from those making decisions is to strike, because it works. Our state doesn't allow strikes, however many say this year's event looks like one. So many teachers are taking personal leave on the same day that schools are unable to function and many systems have chosen to close.

Too many cooks spoil the broth and I challenge you to find a profession that has more bosses than education. Think about it. We've got the Governor, State Board of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction, the legislature, local school superintendents and local boards of education, along with parents, all with their own personal and political agendas.

We've got those leaning left, those leaning right, and both accusing the other of trying to impose their ideology on education. Can we all agree there is too much politics in education?

Thankfully, there are many examples of students who are receiving the sound basic education our constitution guarantees, but far too many aren't. We fuss and fight over specific methods or line item expenditures, but



My Spin
By Tom Campbell

large numbers are abandoning traditional public schools in favor of charters, private or home schools. We should spend some time analyzing why they leave and what we should do in response.

While not denying that some leave because of racial factors, some parents don't feel their child is sufficiently challenged or, conversely, may be unreasonably challenged. Some leave because, in our attempts for accountability, our schools test too much, have too many "thou shalt and thou shalt not's," and don't spend enough time teaching history, civics, basic finance, arts or music.

We favor school choice but don't want to leave our traditional schools unable to accomplish their mission.

Buoyed by the success from last year's rally (as well as results from other states) the Day of Action has 5 goals. First, they demand enough school librarians, psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses and other health professionals to meet national standards.

They insist on a \$15 an hour minimum wage for all school personnel, a 5% raise for non-certified staff, teachers, admin personnel and a 5 percent cost of living adjustment for retirees. They want Medicaid expanded to improve students' health and they want retiree health benefits reinstated for those who will be hired after 2021.

In a perfect world the teachers' goals are idealistic but perhaps overly ambitious. Just as you steer a big ship on a new course two degrees at a time more success might be achieved by fewer, more specific and prioritized goals.

We ask our teachers to do an almost impossible task under difficult circumstances. Whether you agree with all their goals or approve of their tactics in closing schools I hope you can agree we need to support them in educating our children.

This rally is more than teacher pay or money; most acknowledge they didn't go into this profession because of money. Almost as important is the respect and appreciation for the job they do. Maybe we should all rally in Raleigh for education on May 1.

Tom Campbell is former assistant NC State Treasurer and is creator/host of NC SPIN, a weekly statewide television discussion of state issues that airs on UNC-TV Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays 12:30 p.m. Contact him at ncs핀.com.

READERS' FORUM

The times that try men's souls -- then and now

December 19, 1776: Thomas Paine publishes "The American Crisis" in Philadelphia. Four days later, on December 23rd, George Washington assembled his exhausted, starving, half-frozen army of 2,500 volunteers trapped by the British at Valley Forge. They had lost every battle with the British since the start of the war and were now totally demoralized. Many were planning to abandon Washington and return to their homes in two weeks when their enlistment was up. On this day they listened as Washington read out the words of Paine's, "The American Crisis:"

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph."

Against all odds and the overwhelming enemy force, Paine's inspiring words and Washington's strength and leadership spurred the men to complete victory at Trenton on Christmas Day and the eventual liberation from England. It was our first "National Crisis" but there were more to come.

Today, our crisis is a cancer growing on our destiny. It is the cancer of denial and the willful ignorance of the slow, inexorable phenomenon of Global Climate Change. If you believe the earth is flat, that the sun revolves around the earth and that our bodies are ruled by "The Four Humours - Blood, Yellow Bile, Black Bile and Phlegm," then you will also deny the science that is accepted by every country except ours, (thank you Mr. President).

The immediate crisis that faces us is the widely held skepticism that it is impossible to make the huge changes needed to meet the deadline of 2030 when the affects of Climate Change will be irreversible according to latest estimates.

But America's experience of past crises proves that such monumental change is possible. It has happened in the past and we can do it again, now. The Civil War, The Great Depression, and World War II prove

we have the capability and will to overcome the greatest challenges. The unknown factor today is whether we have the skilled, inspired leadership of a Washington, a Lincoln or FDR. (A Trump? I think not.)

With gifted lifted leaders we can meet the challenge ahead. Consider that during World War II our entire country was united and dedicated to defeating the enemy. And what we did is almost unbelievable. In three short, but terrible years, 1942 to 1945, our work force of men and many, many women produced a massive number of tanks, trucks, guns, cannons, munitions, fighter planes, bombers, submarines, battleships, aircraft carriers, and thousands of "Liberty Ships" to carry it all across seas. We fought the enemy in Africa, Italy, France, Germany and all across the Pacific all at the same time.

And we accomplished the single greatest test of all: the Atomic Bomb. The Manhattan Project started from scratch in 1942. It employed some 130,000 women and men and cost 23 billion dollars (in today's money). The theory of the bomb was unproved. In total secrecy we built two separate, immense factories that used two different methods for the bombs. And they worked on the first try.

We can duplicate this kind

of success again to radically change how we produce and use energy. We have already made a start: Estimates are that there will be some 200 million electric cars in use worldwide by 2030.

China, (no surprise), is leading in making these cars and batteries. But the Tesla Company recently installed the world's largest battery backup system in Australia in a record 100 days. It has already cut electric cost in that area by 90% and will repay the cost in three years.

California recently mandated that all new residential construction have solar panels for electricity production. Sam's Club in Asheville is getting on the bandwagon too; they are putting in recharging stations in their parking lot for electric cars.

Perhaps the biggest indicator of the change that is already happening is that the fastest growing jobs are in Wind Generator technicians and Solar Panel installers, (not in coal).

So, as Paine wrote, "These are trying times..." But it was Bob Dylan, who gave us,

"You senators, congressmen please heed the call.

Don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall..."

For the times they are a-changing."

Rob Grenell

Repaying the debt: Storybook highlights the impact of Medicaid gap on veterans

In North Carolina, an estimated 30,000 veterans are uninsured and approximately 12,000 of them are in the coverage gap due to the General Assembly's decision to opt-out of expanding Medicaid.

Contrary to popular belief, many veterans do not qualify for VA care and upon their return from combat or transitioning from the military, accessing care is critical for them and their families.

Keeping our Promise to Military Veterans and their Families, a new storybook from the NC Justice Center's Health Advocacy Project, features the stories of veterans and their family members who have had to grapple with the burdens associated with being uninsured while facing alarmingly high rates of suicide and overdose.

Among young veterans in particular, suicide is all too common. The rate of suicide among veterans aged 18 to 34 is six times higher than that in the civilian populations.

Dr. Orlando Dowdy, a pastor, therapist, and veteran is disturbed to see the suicide rate at such epidemic levels.

"On behavioral health, accessing this resource should not be stigmatizing or difficult," Dr. Dowdy said. "Let's close the coverage gap and expand access to the services they need, making sure we don't have veterans falling through the cracks."

Terry Nowiski, also featured in the storybook, remembers what a hard time her son Aaron had when he returned from combat overseas. He found escape through drugs and tragically overdosed. She now works with others who are suffering from opioid addictions and sees far too many of them unable to get help due to lack of health coverage.

"The opioid epidemic, it is not going away on its own, so let's give people a way to afford

the treatment that they need to beat this thing," she said.

Robert Elliot, a veteran and a farmer, works with hundreds of veterans in the state helping them transition from the military and into farming careers.

"A veteran is the only one that has ever said I will die for every single one of y'all. A farmer is the only one

that has ever said that I am willing to feed all of y'all. However, both of which are having problems with mental health. If the backbone and the belly filler of the nation is unable to work because they're sick or hurt or killing themselves and there is actually a solution to it, then why the hell are we not offering that solution? It makes no sense," said Elliot.

"We owe everything to people who put food on our table and to people who secure this

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Robert Elliot

nation," he said.

Many veterans are not eligible for VA benefits, and many farmers don't make enough to afford insurance or qualify for subsidies on the Online Marketplace. Being uninsured and unable to access care for mental health issues has resulted in both of these populations experiencing high rates of suicide.

North Carolina should be looking out for our veterans and

our farmers to make sure they have access to quality affordable health care.

Closing the coverage gap is one of the many strategies our legislators need to consider to reduce the incidences of suicide among veterans and farmers. Too many veterans and farmers feel isolated, discouraged and unable to seek the care they need.

Read more veteran stories in NC Justice Center's storybook to learn about the reality of living in the health coverage gap in North Carolina. Go to: ncjustice.org/publications/keeping-our-promise-to-military-veterans-and-their-families

From the North Carolina Justice Center. For more information, see ncjustice.org.

You Decide: What's the best 'ISM' for the economy?

By Dr. Mike Walden

As a nation, we're now engaged in a new version of a debate I've heard many times in my 68 years of life, and which actually goes back several hundred years. It's the debate over how we should organize the economy. And - to get to the point - specifically it's the debate between capitalism and socialism.

The question about the best structure of an economy frequently arises during times of economic stress. Many during the Great Depression of the 1930s (actually before my time!) wanted a new economic foundation. Cries for fundamental change in the economy reemerged during the 1970s when rapid inflation was making us poorer.

Fast forward to today. While the economy has been expanding for a decade, two factors are creating apprehension about the future. One is the overhang from the Great Recession of 2007-2009. Not all households have fully recovered from that economic downturn, and even among those who have, many worry it could happen again.

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The second worry is about the rapidly changing job market. The ratcheting up of educational requirements, the disappearance of numerous middle-income jobs and the emergence of technology as a potential replacement for a variety of occupations are worries.

So what exactly are capitalism and socialism? The hallmark feature of capitalism is private control. Resources - like labor, machinery, technology and land - are privately owned, and owners control decisions about the use of those resources. The prices paid to use resources are also privately determined through the interaction of supply (quantity available) of the resources and the demand (willingness to pay) for the resources.

A socialist economy takes the opposite approach. In pure socialism, all resources are publicly owned, with the government being the representative of the government. The government determines what and how much is produced, sets all prices for outputs and inputs -including wages for workers - and develops plans for the long-run growth of the economy.

Both capitalism and socialism have fans and detractors. Supporters of capitalism say its focus on private ownership and decision-making is consistent with individual freedom and liberty. They say the setting of prices in the marketplace through negotiation between buyers and sellers is fair. The process is also quick to eliminate shortages or surpluses with fast movements in prices. Furthermore, competing sellers are constantly motivated to innovate and use resources more efficiently so they can lower their price and - at least tempo-

rarily - take business and profits away from competitors.

The pursuit of profits by capitalists is the major sore point for capitalism's critics. Detractors of capitalism worry the system puts profits above all else, including the welfare of workers and care of the environment. Those questioning capitalism say the system's intense competition results in winners and losers and ultimately greater income inequality.

A concern for worker welfare, a clean environment and greater income equality are goals the promoters of socialism say can be better achieved by this system. Without the worry for maximizing individual profits, socialist supporters believe the government can take a broader view and consider all aspects of what makes for a successful economy for all. In particular, advocates say socialism can better consider the impact advances in technology will have on workers' lives, and therefore can manage the introduction of labor-saving technology so as to minimize disruptions and displacements.

Of course, like capitalists, socialist supporters attract a long list of complaints. At the top is the charge government bureaucrats can't expect to have the knowledge and information necessary to set millions of prices in the economy. Furthermore, because governments are accountable to voters, critics say socialist micro-managers will have an incentive to set prices too low, which can result in chronic shortages and bare shelves.

And although powerful interests attempt to influence governments in capitalist systems, those questioning socialism say

the same will happen in socialism - and perhaps even more so because socialist governments have more influence over the economy.

There is an alternative to pure capitalist and pure socialist economic systems. It is a "mixed system," which many say our country has had for decades. The notion is to keep capitalism but try to use the government to ease the system's rough edges. So there will still be the private incentives to businesses and workers that encourages innovation, self-improvement and delivering products and services to consumers at the lowest cost. Prices and wages will still be set in the marketplace, and there will still be people succeeding and those not.

But those not succeeding won't be forgotten and tossed aside. Instead, the government will have a broad "safety net" that catches people when they fall. However, the challenge is to have programs and plans in place that make the "safety net" actually a "success net," where people can bounce back and ultimately be successful on their own.

So, you decide - capitalism, socialism or the mixed system - which is the best way to structure our economy? This is one of the most fundamental choices we collectively make, and one that will likely be revisited frequently in the future.

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