

"To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical."
 - Thomas Jefferson, "The Virginia Act," 1786 -

Solving The Schools' Social Ills: Let Free Markets Reign

As evidenced by last Tuesday's Town Hall Action Meeting regarding school bullying in Laramie County School District #1 (LCSD1), this issue is finally beginning to get the attention it deserves. It's tragic that 13-year-old Carey Junior High student Alexander Frye had to take his own life to escape such bullying for that to happen, and - as Alexander's sister, Lauren Bard, said in the meeting, "This shouldn't have happened; we all need to learn something from this." ("Town Hall Action Meeting' Draws Crowd, Discusses Bullying Problem," Page 1.)

And, indeed, we do - but will we? Yes, it's true that parents need to be more involved with their children; and yes, it's also true that our educators face many obstacles, with their legal inability to take any action in restoring discipline, accountability and personal responsibility to the classrooms topping the list; and yes, it's also true that it's the students, themselves, who need to learn to respect one another and quit playing these stupid, destructive games.

So, striving to improve in all these areas is good - it's certainly better than doing nothing, which has generally been the involved parties' approach for decades. None of it, however, will have any lasting impact until we come to understand the true nature of the problem: A tax-supported, monopolistic school system that does not have to succeed in order to gain students.

As evidence, consider the same principles of operation we've chosen to apply to the schools, were they to be applied to another area of our lives: Restaurants. Suppose you don't like the service at Joe's Diner any longer and you've decided to eat at Alice's Restaurant instead - but, as you exit the establishment, never hav-

ing eaten one bite, you find yourself seized by Joe's employees and relieved of the money you *might* have spent, *had* you stayed to eat. Suppose, further, that your plundered earnings were all the food money you had. What are your "choices"? To starve - or resume your seat and eat dinner at Joe's whether you like it or not. And, as you eat, you'd ask yourself: How much quality food or service will you ever be able to expect out of Joe's in the future, as long as they have a guaranteed monopoly on your "business"?

And so it goes with our schools: How many parents, fed up with the "services" rendered in our public halls, can afford to quit the system and use the so-called "private" market instead, when they're still coerced into paying for those public halls whether they like it or not? And what kind of true success in the provision of educational services can we ever expect to see, in the complete absence of any market-based incentives to bring it about? *This is the problem, and it's the only problem, for a true free market in education would act to reward those who succeed and punish those who fail.* In such a dynamic, competitive environment, solutions to all our other school issues would quickly be found, because voluntarily-paying customers simply wouldn't tolerate anything less.

By snapping the link between educational services and the free choice of parents to spend their money as they see fit, we've obliterated the ability of the system to create, innovate, adapt and adjust itself to altering market conditions. *That is our lesson for the day, what we really need to learn here - and, until we do, all other attempts at solving these problems are doomed to ultimate failure.* Class dismissed.

"There's no fair way to steal." - Andrew Galambos, *Sic Itur Ad Astra*, 1998 -

The Sixth Penny Problem? That It's There To Be Taken

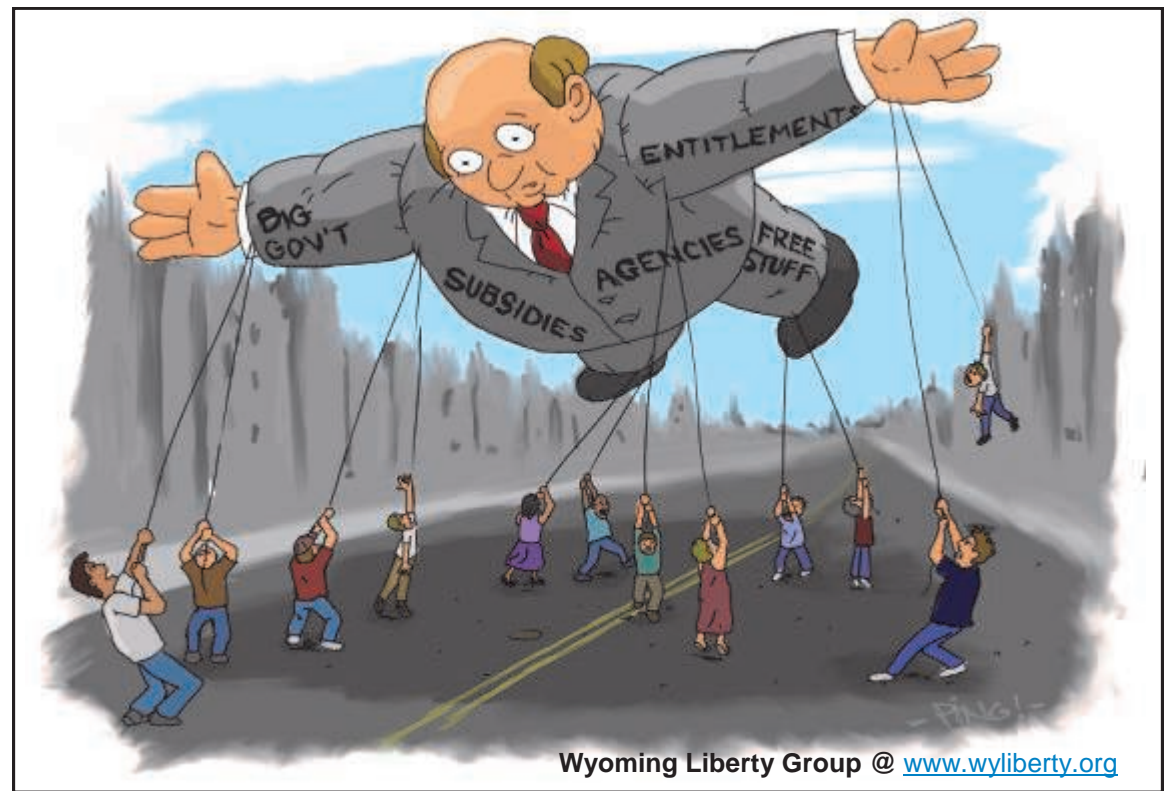
As could have been predicted ahead of time, yet another upcoming Sixth Penny ballot measure has introduced yet more controversy amongst the governing bodies in question as to how the plunder's best to be divided up and spent - and that's a surprise? The tax, itself, guarantees that such controversies are bound to arise; it's actually built right into the system, and little else should be expected but for such controversies to occur.

The City of Cheyenne, for instance, argues that - as the main population center of Laramie County and the source of most of the Sixth Penny revenue - it should get the lion's share of the monies generated by the tax. With Laramie County as a whole at a population of 91,738 according to the 2010 Census, and Cheyenne accounting for 59,466 of those people by that same Census, that places Cheyenne's share of Laramie County's population at 64.8 percent, yet Cheyenne's share of the Sixth Penny largess of \$105 million only comes to \$57 million, or 54.3 percent. Which means: Per head, Cheyenne residents receive disproportionately less on their return, while residents of the other, less-populated areas of Laramie County receive more. Indeed, the exact amount for a Cheyenne resident's

return from the Sixth Penny tax comes to just \$958.53 - whereas a resident of the town of Albin, for instance, with a population of only 120 but Sixth Penny tax receipts of \$3.2 million instead, enjoys a return of \$26,666.66, a ratio increase of 2,782 percent.

That hardly seems fair, and some people in both the past and the present have recommended that these ratios be rectified. But how? For, consider another fact as well: If some of that Sixth Penny tax money, regardless of where a Laramie County citizen lives, has been used to purchase "services" he might not have any use for - such as, say, a fairground or a rec center - that resident's "return" on his "investment" is ZERO.

The biggest computer in the world couldn't figure it out, no matter how big it got, because there's simply no way to incorporate all the millions of factors and individual choices made by nearly 100,000 people into the equation. No, the only thing that could even come close to being "fair" would be to simply divide \$105 million by 91,738 and hand each and every resident of Laramie County a check for \$1,144.56, call it good, and let everybody spend their money as they see fit. Were we to do that, of course, then the next question would be: Why have the tax in the first place?



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The Editor's Mailbag



Landfill Expansion Most Critical Issue Facing Cheyenne Today

"Complacency by the watchdogs hurts both taxpayers and beneficiaries." (U.S. Senator Charles Grassley, R-Iowa)

Unfortunately, complacency is exactly what has happened with the critical landfill issue Cheyenne has been facing for the past 10 years.

Expanding the landfill for future generations was first discussed in 1990 - 21 years ago, and yet, today, Cheyenne has still not solved the rapidly approaching problem of what to do with its solid waste when the existing landfill is full. That time is just a mere 5-6 years away, but the City has shied away from pursuing a definitive answer to the question.

Many options have been explored, for example: "Waste-to-energy"; expanding the existing landfill; building a new landfill; and continuing to haul to Ault, Colo. Exploring each option is interesting if kept in context.

To continue to haul to Colorado permanently is a very short-sighted and reckless idea, since Cheyenne will not be in control of its solid-waste future. We currently have a cost of just over \$1.1 million a year for hauling costs, in addition to \$1.3 million in tipping fees. These prices will continue to increase at a level that will be unsustainable and uncontrollable if left in the hands of others who own the Colorado landfill. Hauling to Colorado was meant to be a temporary, bridge-the-gap idea until a final solution was mandated by the Mayor and Governing Body.

"Waste-to-energy" sounds like a great idea and by definition it is, but Cheyenne's mere 200 tons a day of solid waste would not support the cost of a waste-to-energy concept. The cost to produce the energy would exceed the return on investment and would, in actuality, cost Cheyenne home and business owners more than it would save. The technology is just not available at this time for the amount of solid waste Cheyenne generates; therefore, the "waste-to-energy" idea unacceptable.

Building a new landfill was heavily discussed several years ago and was one of the factors driving the purchase of the Belvoir Ranch west of the City, a fact most have forgotten or would rather not believe - but building a new landfill on the Belvoir would be very expensive. Cost estimates in excess of \$50 million are anticipated and the travel expense for city sanitation vehicles would increase exponentially because of the added distances from the transfer station. Building a new landfill on the Belvoir, though plausible, is not at the top of the list of the Governing Body's and City staff's recommendations.

Expanding the existing landfill has been discussed more recently, since new information from the State has made it appear the Dept. of Environmental Quality would work with the City to permit an expansion of the current site. An expansion when the Belvoir was bought was thought not to be an option at the time. A total project cost to permit, expand the landfill, acquire the necessary equipment to run the landfill and expand the current transfer station for safety and necessary equipment-related reasons is \$30 million: \$21 million for the landfill, \$3 million for the needed equipment and \$6 million for the transfer station expansion. It is important to note: All three pieces of the equation must come together at the same time to make the current comprehensive plan work fluently. This option makes the most sense, but time is of the essence for the development of the expansion, since it will take approximately four years to complete the project.

With 5-6 years of life left on the current landfill a decision with funding needs to happen sooner than later. Rumors abound about how the City's Sanitation Dept. generates far more revenue than it has in expenses, but the truth is a full cost accounting shows the sanitation's overall department is, for all practical purposes a break-even venture for the city. Revenue from the Sanitation Dept. in fiscal year 2011 totaled \$12.8 million, while the expenses of payroll, employee benefits, fuel, tires, vehicle maintenance and repair, utilities associated with the transfer station, ongoing expenses for monitoring of the landfill, equipment purchases and long-term lease debts on that equipment totaled \$12.3 million. A return on an investment of \$500,000, or 3.9 percent, hardly makes a "profitable sanitation department" when considering volatile fuel costs and any potential increase in tipping fees from the Ault landfill owners.

Early discussions for the upcoming sixth penny referendum included adding the \$30 million landfill

expansion and associated projects to it so the cost could be absorbed by all residents and visitors to the county one penny at a time. Somewhere between early discussions and now, however, the landfill issue was removed from the projected ballot to make room for other high-profile projects that are not associated with the public's health, safety and welfare. The landfill was removed by resolution of the Governing Body several weeks ago, a decision I helped make - and, in retrospect, one I'm not proud of, after more fully exploring the ramifications of our actions. The sixth penny option would raise the entire amount needed in just a few years and allow the City to pursue the expansion by paying cash as the project progressed.

Recent new ideas of bonding the landfill expansion or borrowing money from the State come with some complications that are just now coming to light. The City's bonding capacity is currently only \$20.9 million, barely enough for the expansion and far short of the needed \$30 million. Borrowing funds from the State at 2.5 percent interest also means a loan that must be paid back over a 20-to-25-year period with interest. Either way, the City encumbers its assets for many years into the future - and, in order to make the bond payment obligations, minimum rate increases to the citizens of as much as 17 percent could need to be implemented.

We as a City need to ask ourselves: Do we want to borrow the money we need for a project and pay interest for many years into the future - or does it make more sense to pay as you go and not owe money at the completion of the project? Clearly, the sixth penny interest-free ballot option is the most compelling reason not to try and bond or borrow money for the project.

It just makes sense to strongly urge all voters to contact their City Council Representative, the Mayor and County Commissioners, asking to reinstate the \$30 million landfill project to the sixth penny ballot so you, the voter, can make that call.

Jim Brown, Cheyenne

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Ph.D. In Education Vs. BA In History

"Public schooling in America was born when a group of community members got together and decided they wanted their children to be literate for the primary purpose of being able to read the Holy Bible so they would not be 'deceived by the old deluder, Satan.'" - Mark Stock, Superintendent of Public Schools, Laramie County School District #1, from "The Supe's On," <http://supeson.laramie1.org>, Jan. 19 -

This from a guy with a Ph.D. in Education. "(Horace) Mann has been credited by educational historians as the 'Father of the Common School Movement'... It was not until he was appointed secretary (1837) of the newly created Board of Education of Massachusetts (the first such position in the United States) that he began the work which was to place him in the foremost rank of American educationists. Previously he had shown no special interest in education. He was only encouraged to take the job because it was a paid office position established by the legislature... Under the auspices of the board, but at his own expense, he went to Europe in 1843 to visit schools, especially in Prussia, and his seventh annual report, published after his return, embodied the results of his tour... In 1852, he supported the decision to adopt the Prussian education system in Massachusetts." - Horace Mann, Wikipedia -

The Wikipedia entry for the "Prussian education system," in its turn, tells us that "The Prussian court attempted to install social obedience in the citizens through indoctrination. Every individual had to become convinced, in the core of his being, that the King was just, his decisions always right, and the need for obedience paramount... The purpose of the system was to instill loyalty to the Crown and to train young men for the military and the bureaucracy. As the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a key influence on the system, said, 'If you want to influence [the student] at all, you must do more than merely talk to him; you must fashion him, and fashion him in such a way that he simply cannot will otherwise than what you wish him to will.'"

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