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Opinion #32

What the newspapers won't tell you!

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PUBLIC EDUCATION IN LAS VEGAS

NO NEW TAXES?

...then watch your city burn

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

Another week, another school shooting. The latest was apparently a 10th grader killing a 9th grader in a drive-by near Palo Verde High.

It may sound like nothing new for Las Vegas, but this was Summerlin, our planned-community heaven, the sort of place where residents pay big bucks to isolate their families from the supposed chaos of the inner city.

Could it be there are no safe havens in Las Vegas? Maybe we're all together on the same sinking ship.

What is the solution to school violence? Better security? More police? Maybe we should prosecute more children as adults so they pay for their youthful mistakes with a lifetime sentence. Better yet, we could arm all teachers, so when a kid pulls a gun in class the teacher can shoot back.

Or we could improve our schools. Imagine a school system that didn't just teach the three R's to the students who bother to show up. Imagine one that actually reached out to students in need and tried to address the underlying issues that lead to violence and academic failure.

You may call me a dreamer, a hopeless romantic, but other states manage to pull it off. Most other states have only a fraction of our dropout rate—probably the best barometer for

how well we are serving troubled youth. Few school systems are as blindly punitive as ours, and few have such poor resources beyond the federally mandated minimums.

What's the core difference between other school systems and ours? Money.

Arming teachers doesn't cost much, but counseling services do. It takes expensive manpower to figure out why a kid is acting out and find an effective way to address it. Extracurricular activities cost money. Youth diversion programs cost money.

Most of all, it takes money to attract and retain good teachers, those who have a sense for their students beyond just a grade sheet.

Nevada politicians often give lip service to education—Our children are our future, yada, yada.—but Nevada as a society isn't yet committed to funding it.

Nevada is and always has been a “no new taxes” state. This philosophy may have been tenable when growth was exponential, but now we're hitting a brick wall. Our growth-based tax structure—relying mainly on sales tax on building supplies and luxury goods—is no longer adequate to maintain even our current rudimentary services.

Efforts to increase taxes on our gaming industry have so far failed. Guess what: The gaming industry doesn't want more taxes, and as long as they hold the purse strings in most local

elections, no change in this area is likely.

Sales and property tax rates can't be raised much more, so what is left? There's an elephant in the room that no one dares mention.

Income taxes.

There, I said it. Income taxes. Taxes on wages and corporate profits.

I realize that I have just sacrificed any hope of holding public office in Nevada, but someone had to say it.

Income taxes are the primary way grown-up states fund government services. For readers unfamiliar with the concept, it's like federal income taxes but assessed by the state, usually based on ones federal tax return.

This tax system may be difficult politically, but technically it's easy. Most payroll systems can handle it. From every paycheck, a certain amount is withheld for the federal government—to support the war in Iraq. On the next line would be a much smaller amount withheld for state government.

The state levy is needed to fund the public services to prevent Nevada from resembling Iraq in the future.

—G.C.

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