

Quid Est Veritas

Paying Our Dues



By Patrick Weadon
What greater or better gift can we offer the republic than to teach and instruct our youth? Cicero

Recently a pundit for the *New York Times* came up with an innovative idea; take the word taxes out of the political lexicon and replace it with the word "dues." His reasoning was based on the notion that the word "tax" has always had a pejorative connotation. The word "dues" on the other hand literally conjures up an image of someone providing to a person or organization their "just due."

This idea made a great deal of sense to me because it has the potential to help people understand there is a connection between the amount of monies paid to an organization and its ability to perform its mission. In short, a club that is composed of individuals who refuse to pay

their dues will logically not remain a club for long.

I thought about this notion last month when I read the wonderful letter to the *Severna Park Voice* from a music teacher at Benfield Elementary regarding the staffing crisis there. Her letter made the important point that reduced funding at Benfield is having a deleterious effect on the ability of the school to do its job.

In her succinct, but well written letter, she makes some excellent points, not the least of which is that both the teachers and the school system currently "need more help, not less, from our county."

I hope our county council and school board members read the letter. Furthermore, I hope that at some point they will stop throwing up their hands and whining: "There is nothing we can do; our hands are tied by the tax cap."

I digress, back to the subject of "dues." Imagine for a moment that everyone in our community is member of a wonderful organization called "The Severna Park Schools Club." This club has no pool or golf course; its sole purpose is to educate our children. Every month the members of the club pay dues to the leadership, and let's say at some point a majority of the members decide to put a cap on the amount of money the club can ask for. As a result, the club's

effectiveness begins to deteriorate and, finally, let's say the leadership calls a meeting in an effort to raise dues to save the organization, but instead of taking action the membership demands the dues be reduced even further.

You get the idea... we are de-funding our children's future. We are the fourth richest county in the richest state in the country and, yet, if you go by the amount of money spent per pupil in our county we lag behind many other state school systems. Currently we spend \$9,209 per pupil. Montgomery County spends \$12,004 and Howard County spends 10,716. Even school districts in places my grandparents used to call "The Sticks" outspend us (Somerset, \$10,622, Dorchester, \$9,632 and Kent, \$10,622).*

Now I can hear the braying hyenas on the right beginning to scream, "When will you liberals learn you can't just throw money at the problem?" My answer to them is a quote from the late teacher, academic and humorist Leo Rosten: "Money can't buy happiness, but neither can poverty."

Presently, Severna Park schools are by no means impoverished, but the troubling fact is they are headed way too fast in that direction.

I am aware that government on all levels has a less than stellar record at using our tax dollars efficiently. I know from personal experience that way too much of the money we send to our elected representatives ends up being wasted. However, it is asking too much to devise a plan that has the capacity to "target" the funds needed to ensure our schools have what they need to prepare our children for the 21st Century?

One last idea: I believe it would be a good thing for the members of the Anne Arundel County Council and school board to take a field trip to Richard Montgomery High School in Montgomery County. Richard Montgomery has been around for decades and like our own Severna Park High had seen better days. In order to address the problem, the county funded a program to replace the dilapidated 1942 facility.

The new Richard Montgomery High is two football fields long (the school is so large and spacious the principal has to use a golf cart to go from one end to the other). The new building features wireless internet, LCD projectors in every classroom, interactive electronic wallboards and fixtures that resemble old-time street lamps. It cost 87 million dollars to build.

Quite simply, I believe our children deserve similar kinds of facilities. Moreover, I believe it is worth asking if Montgomery County can provide these kinds of facilities for their kids why can't we?

Some will say that raising taxes across the board to upgrade our schools is unpopular and maybe unwise, perhaps, but why is it that our respective political leaders cannot come up with innovative and creative ways to fund the schools that are so critical to the future of our community? The last time we built a new high school in this county Ronald Reagan was in the White House.

So, if you don't want to pay more in taxes, fine; don't think of them as taxes, think of them as "dues" to the Severna Park Schools Club. Right now the roof of the clubhouse is leaking and the walls could use a coat of paint. But nothing will happen unless we realize it is time to take action and bring our school system up to par with those of the rest of the state. It is indeed time for all of us to pay our educational dues.

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Media Revolution

nals, Bishops, and Pastors, have behaved like greedy finance ministers hiding priestly abuse under a stack of personnel files in an attempt to advance careers and solidify ambitions. Instead of offering compassion to victims of sexual abuse, too many in the American Archdiocesan bureaucracy have attempted to smear their own faithful with PR tactics that would make Hillary Rodham Clinton blush.

With so few children of Christian identity being born in Europe today, Pope Benedict is well aware a skeptical and disengaged younger generation, not a shortage of priests, is the true crisis facing the universal Church.

Since 1950 over 12,000 documented victims, mostly boys, have suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the clergy. In response, Pope Benedict has vowed to make do with fewer priests need be, and to renew his commitment to Catholic education in America. For Catholic elementary and secondary schools it couldn't happen at a better time. Since 1990, over 300,000 pupils have been displaced in U.S. Catholic schools, and since 1999, 1,267 Catholic schools have closed.

No doubt Pope Benedict

recognizes the intersecting timeline of \$2 billion in damages from priestly abuse and the drain on resources for thousands of Catholic schools. Yet there are promising trends on the American horizon.

In Wichita, Kansas, for example, church leaders have embarked on an ambitious campaign asking parishioners to tith a higher percentage of their income. The result is that Catholic school tuition there is free for Catholic students and very low for non-Catholics. Another area of high growth is Catholic schools that operate outside the diocesan structure. These schools are less encumbered by diocesan bureaucracy and tend to be run by professional Catholic educators and business people rather than parish priests, who have little experience in running an enterprise like a school.

Benedict is a former educator whose personal qualities of modesty and gentleness are deeply rooted, but just as the seemingly mild-mannered John Paul II helped overthrow communism, this Pope is courageously confronting the enemies of religious freedom. Early in his tenure Benedict revealed his strategy for bat-

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ncil In Action

their budget on May 2 at 1:00pm. The public is invited, but no public testimony will be taken.

At the same time, the Council will be considering Bill 23-08, which is sponsored by Councilmen Dillon and Benoit. This bill will be of great interest to those who have students in our public school system as it seeks to increase the acceptable capacity levels for students to **105% of the elementary school state rated capacity and 110% of the middle school and high school state rated capacity.** The bill will also reduce the time a developer has to sit on a waiting list from six years to three.

I have many concerns about this bill and have begun to talk to the sponsors about those concerns. The bill appears, on its face, to say that at the end of three years if the school is still overcrowded, a development may proceed,

even though the school is over capacity, regardless of how overcrowded it is.

Recently I completed a tour of every school in our district and had opportunities to speak with parent groups, students and administrators, and to walk around to see for myself how schools are being used. I toured open and closed spaced schools, recently renovated schools, new schools, and a few that somehow keep getting overlooked each year.

I am happy to report that at every school, the students, staff and faculty were wonderful, making me feel quite comfortable as I roamed the schools, interrupted classes, used new technology (I love the Smart boards!) and received a few lessons from students who made sure I knew what was important to them. Let me pause... and say **thank you** to each and everyone of you. I also saw schools

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