

June 14, 2010

CAMPAIGN SEASON IS PUT-UP OR SHUT-UP FOR TEACHERS

Okay, teachers. It is put-up or shut-up time.

Political candidates are out and about the state of Georgia trying to convince you and me that they are public education's best friend.

If you feel you have been cuffed around, disregarded and disrespected by the same politicians who now solicit your vote, this is your moment.

Just as you do in class, ask them hard questions and expect straight answers. The shoe is on the other foot for the time being. Just remember that politicians can be slicker than axle grease.

Ask your local state senator or representative who controls education policy in Georgia and see what they say. Ask them if there even is an education policy and, if so, to tell you what it is.

Ask them what their plans are to have Georgia's next generation ready to compete in the international marketplace and if what they have done and plan to do will get us on a level playing field with the rest of the world. And when? If incumbents are facing competition, ask their opponents the same questions.

To my knowledge, all the candidates running for governor say they will be our next "education governor." I am pretty sure they will all say that they will reduce class size, stop the furloughs and restore funding to the school systems.

I am also pretty sure that elephants would fly if they had wings.

The truth is that public education – as you know and as I have stated ad nauseum – has too many players in the game, all with a different view on what makes for good education policy, including our dysfunctional friends in Washington who are doing such a great job managing the Gulf oil disaster and who have made obesity and banning peanuts on airplanes top federal initiatives. We certainly don't want to leave them out.

One gubernatorial candidate has managed to distinguish himself from the others with his view on school vouchers. Former Georgia Senate President Pro Tempore Eric Johnson, a Savannah Republican, is on-the-record as supporting vouchers as he did while in the General Assembly.

At a recent meeting of the Georgia School Boards Association, Johnson is quoted as saying his support of vouchers which would allow the state to give tax dollars to underwrite private school tuition reflects his "bedrock faith in free market principles."

If Johnson is such a free-market disciple, why doesn't he just go ahead and get rid of public schools altogether? As for me, I believe if someone wants to send their child to private schools, more power to them. Just not with my tax dollars.

You may be sure that if Eric Johnson is elected governor and Sen. Chip Rogers (R-Woodstock) wins reelection and maintains his role as majority leader, you will see a strong push for school vouchers. If you believe school vouchers should be an education priority in Georgia, then Eric Johnson is your man. Tell your friends why vouchers will make a difference -- assuming any voucher proponent has deigned to tell you why.

Conversely, if you think school vouchers are as meaningful to improving public education as female appendages on a boar hog, tell your friends that, too, and ask them to remember that fact when it comes time to step into the voting booth.

By the way, none of the Democratic candidates like vouchers and said so. David Poythress said he will veto "anything that looks like a voucher." The Republican candidates seem to be a little less forthcoming about school vouchers. This campaign season is the only political leverage you will have in determining how you get to do your job (until the next election.) Once everyone is safely ensconced under the Gold Dome, your classroom concerns will be largely ignored and you will be subjected once more to the vagaries of the people currently seeking your vote, the usual reams of bureaucratic red tape and professional education groups that sometimes seem as though they don't speak to each other, let alone speak for you.

Remember, school teachers, this is the time for hard questions and straight answers. Don't flunk this opportunity.