

The process of fixing is eternal

I have struggled mightily to deliver this opinion piece. In truth, I always struggle.

The problem I am wrestling with today is restating the same old thing in a compelling enough way to provoke and sustain positive, concerted action in a time of desperate uncertainty about the future of Montana's public institutions, programs, and services.

Fact is, no matter how I may restate the problem, the problem remains the same as the problem we have faced for years.

For so long as I have been president of the former MEA and now MEA-MFT, the political leaders of this magnificent state consistently have sacrificed adequately funded quality public programs and services before the altar of a decrepit tax system and politically opportunistic tax cuts.

Our politicians' chronic inability to address comprehensive tax reform in good economic times absolutely paralyzes us in bad economic times when the people are in greatest need of the services MEA-MFT members provide.

Montana's bitterly partisan politics have failed to develop any consensus on what a good state tax system should look like, how much money it should raise, and how much the state should spend.

No consensus whatsoever, period.

Heroic struggles

Consequently, whether we work in state and local governments, the university system, or elementary and secondary education, our ability to deliver quality is so constantly challenged that thinking about how to escape this politically contrived death-by-tax-system-stupidity-and-starvation is at times overwhelming.

And depressingly sad.

Absent an adequate, equitable, balanced, simple, and universal tax system that does not run south on us in every economic downturn or is aborted by this governor and legislature or that, the work we, the terrific folks who pay dues to MEA-MFT, do will always be a struggle, albeit a heroic one.

I am sorry.

Fortunately, no matter how dark the mood of

the day, all is not lost. MEA-MFT has plenty of energy and commitment to fix that which is broken.

As I write, we are at the forefront of efforts to fix this political wreck. We will continue to do all we can to undress those political charlatans who would fool the good citizens of this state that they can demand and receive quality without paying for it.

Building momentum

Our fix will not come easy and overnight. The process of fixing is eternal.

But we believe we have picked up momentum in recent months. For instance, MEA-MFT has parented and then partnered with many like-minded and responsible parties to launch Stand Up for Education. The sole purpose of Stand Up is to create a critical mass of public support for better state funding of k-higher public education. Media reporters and editors paid close attention and commended our efforts.

We have joined the Montana Quality Education Coalition in part to conduct the school funding adequacy study the state cannot seem to do but mostly to sue the state for its abject failure to meet its constitutional obligation to fund k-12 public schools adequately and equitably.

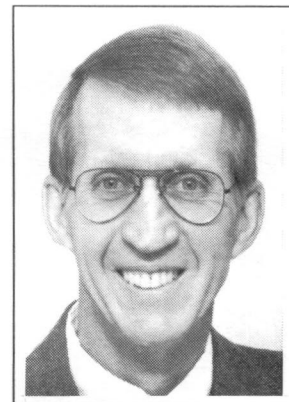
Along with major business and other education leaders, we are full participants in the Economic Development Action Group and the Alliance for Montana's Future to boost state support of higher education.

As always we are visiting with legislators and legislative candidates to discern their support for our issues from employee safety to program delivery to competitive salaries to cost effective health care, all of which scream out for—dare I say it—a significant increase in taxes!

Even in these hard times, Montana must spend more to preserve and enhance quality public programs and services and—the governor's mind-numbing, supply side, trickle down ideology notwithstanding—grow our economy.

There really is no other way.

Please, all of you, enjoy a productive, positive, fun-filled summer. ■



BY ERIC FEAVER
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