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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

Pitting K-12 Against Higher Education

When the facts are against you, get someone else to fight your battle. That appears to be a new strategy in legislative attempts to ignore the constitution and continue the under-funding of Kansas public schools.

Employing a new strategic version of “divide and conquer,” conservative legislators are telling Kansans that they must choose between fully funded K-12 schools and fully funded higher education opportunities. Recently Representative Jerry Lunn (R-Overland Park) told University of Kansas Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little that if the Kansas Supreme Court orders adequate funding for K-12 education, the legislature would be forced to take that money from our colleges and universities. “Talk to your friendly Supreme Court Justices,” was Lunn’s recommendation to the Chancellor; *as reported on November 4, 2013 in the Lawrence World Journal, “Legislators say big budget cuts to higher ed, other areas would occur if public schools win finance lawsuit.”*

Pitting groups against each other is what you do when your real goal is to distract the public from the reality of policies that are actually causing the problem. In this case, the Legislature and Governor have drained state coffers through massive income tax cuts benefiting the wealthy. As a result, they acknowledge that the money is not there to adequately fund K-12 education, higher education, and other essential state services.

The District Court in ruling on the current school finance case pointed this out. Their decision notes that the state had the funding to restore education cuts made necessary by the recession but chose to give those funds away in massive tax cuts rather than fund education.

The engine that will drive economic development into the future is a well-educated Kansas workforce. That demands well-funded education from pre-school through graduate school. Kansans want their children to be prepared to meet the rigors of college and career. However, being prepared for college isn’t enough if a college education is unaffordable. The decisions to be made by the 2014 Legislature when it comes to funding education will have an enormous impact on the future of Kansas.

The teachers, instructors, and professors of this state will not allow themselves to be used by legislators who wish to dismantle opportunity in favor of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. The members of the Kansas National Education Association know that the work they do is not complete until each Kansas child reaches his or her full potential and that includes affordable opportunities to pursue post-secondary education in community colleges, technical colleges, and four-year universities.

Education is a seamless process from preschool through graduate school. Only when we provide for the full spectrum of education will we attract and retain the jobs of the 21st century and beyond.

As KNEA President Karen Godfrey has remarked, **“Investing in public education at all levels is not a burden. It is an investment in our future.”**

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