

Spin Cycle

Sometimes we are reminded of the songs we have loved over the years. So it is today as we watch House Speaker Ray Merrick (R-Stilwell) and Governor Brownback responding to questions about the school finance bill passed by one vote in the House and two in the Senate that we are torn between singing Billy Preston's "Will It Go Round in Circles" or "Spinning Wheel" by Blood, Sweat and Tears.

Back before the Merrick spin cycle started, hundreds of teachers lined the halls of the capitol and listened as legislators crowed about the end of job protections for teachers. They stood and praised at-will employment where teachers could be let go for any reason and school districts would not have the headache of justifying their decisions. They were proud of what they were doing and they made a show of it.

They apparently thought that all of Kansas would cheer. But that's not what happened. Teachers got angry and began calling on the Governor to veto the bill. Parents and school administrators joined in, condemning this attack on teachers. Every newspaper in the state weighed in on their editorial pages blasting the bill as bad policy passed with no transparency in the dark of night. An online petition calling for a veto garnered more than 15,000 signatures in less than 24 hours.

In reaction, Speaker Merrick issued his "talking points" in which he argued that the legislature had not done away with due process for teachers; that school districts would still have to tell a teacher why he or she was let go and the teacher could have a hearing. Under examination by the Wichita Eagle, the Speaker had to issue a new statement. This time he said he was misled by staff and that indeed, teachers would not have to be told why and would not have an appeal process. The new spin was that it was all someone else's fault.

And when that didn't end the criticism, Merrick's communications director Rachel Whitten tried to put a new spin on the issue. They returned to the idea that they had not done anything except remove a mandate. School districts can, if they want, respect their teachers by granting due process protections.

What has never been addressed in Merrick's continual attempts to spin his actions is

why those due process protections were put in the law in the first place. Way back in 1957, the Kansas Supreme Court weighed in by calling due process for teachers sound public policy. Ruling the case of *Million v Board of Education*, the Court declared

"...to protect competent and worthy instructors and other members of the teaching profession against unjust dismissal of any kind - political, religious or personal, and secure for them teaching conditions which will encourage their growth in the full practice of their profession, unharried by constant pressure and fear but it does not confer special privileges or immunities upon them to retain permanently their positions or salary, nor permit their interference with the control or efficient operation of the public-school system; and, notwithstanding it grants tenure to those who have taught the requisite period, it nonetheless empowers Boards of Education to discharge them for just cause in an orderly manner by the procedures specified." *Million v. Board of Education*, 181 Kan. 230, 310 P.2nd 917 (1957)

Due process protections have been in place in Kansas for decades. Very few hearings are held. Administrators are apparently doing their jobs because ineffective teachers are let go despite the protections. Our students are benefiting from one of the best public education systems in the country. Even the anti-public education, anti-teacher bill mill, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), says that the Kansas public education system is the eighth best in the country.

Perhaps Maria Penrod, a Mass Communications major at Kansas State University, put it best in an editorial written for "The Collegian." Penrod said,

"Kansas teachers (who are paid the 42nd lowest in the country) deserve better than this. We have all had a teacher who helped form us into who we are now. We revered and admired them. They stayed after school to help us with Spanish verbs; they came in early so we could make up an algebra test. They endured long bus rides, late basketball tournaments and weekend choir competitions, working far longer than 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Their smiles and encouragement kept us learning. Now, when we see them at a hometown play or football game, their faces light up as we tell them of our college achievements and aspirations. Aren't these civil servants worthy of job security?"

Thank you, Maria. We hope Governor Brownback is listening.

Will he or won't he?

We have been asked many times what the Governor will do and we always have the same answer: "He will either veto it or sign it or let it become law without his signature." That may sound like a silly answer (those are, after all, his only three options) but really, the response is based on what he's been saying since immediately after the passage of HB 2506.

Shortly after the bill passed, Governor Brownback, who had been notably absent from the capitol during the debate and discussion on what is arguably the most important issue in the 2014 legislative session, released a message indicated how pleased he was with the bill that had been passed and praising House and Senate Republican leaders.

After the backlash from the public started, the Governor indicated that he had not read the bill and would reserve judgment. In his public messages he had not addressed the policy issues in the bill, preferring to focus on the financial measures - measures which reduce at-risk funding and allow school districts to raise more in local property taxes. He is also letting Roadmap Solutions - a political organization - speak for him through television ads in which he touts himself as a great friend of education but still remains silent on the policy issues ramrodded into the finance bill.

As he has roamed the state and been confronted with protestors, he has waived dramatically in his public statements about his intentions. On one day, speaking at Emporia State University he announced that he would sign the bill. Later on the same day, he told reporters at Wichita State University that a veto was still on the table and he was weighing his options.

So right now, the bill is sitting on his desk. He has until next week to make his decision. He's either going to sign it or veto it or let it become law without his signature!

What can you do? Take action!

Until the Governor's mind is made up, we urge you to call on him to veto this bill and direct the legislature to send him a clean school finance bill. You can help by signing the petition and then sharing it with everyone you know via email, twitter, or Facebook. **Click here for the petition!**^[1]

And once you've done that, **click here to send an email directly to the Governor**^[2].

Tell him why he should veto this terrible legislation!

1. [http://click.email.nea.org/?](http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=6abca45987413c7e35533818034a76359f0f91df62ac7fa616b585f9f27370d474f7769151d390d6)

qs=6abca45987413c7e35533818034a76359f0f91df62ac7fa616b585f9f27370d474f7769151d390d6

2. [http://click.email.nea.org/?](http://click.email.nea.org/?qs=6abca45987413c7e3d955842f4e6bed749be3a5eeb1b370f1f5040930700b8648fc8c52fbf2ca687)

qs=6abca45987413c7e3d955842f4e6bed749be3a5eeb1b370f1f5040930700b8648fc8c52fbf2ca687