

Restoring American Exceptionalism:
Notes and Comments

For another perspective see Jamie LaRue's blog <http://jaslarue.blogspot.com/>

About 1200 people attended the "Restoring American Exceptionalism" event at the DC Events Center, January 24. Hopefully, they brought their smart phone and were listening to State of the Union Address at the same time. About 10 stood up and identified themselves as teachers.

Steve Kelly, 710 KNUS talk show host, was the celebrity moderator. Jeff Crank, Americans for Prosperity Colorado President, was the other moderator. The event was being broadcast live to NE, WY, MI, and CA. Kelly opened the meeting with some derogatory political comments, followed by "but this isn't a political event." Crank notified the TV as well as those sitting in the audience that questions would be taken via text messages. Students from Woodland Academy led the Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem. [I am surprised there was no prayer.]

Crank opened the discussion with an analogy: We can all shop at Walmart to buy apples, and if the apples are bad, we can shop for apples at a different Walmart. If a school is bad, why can't I go to another school? I'd live in a smaller house to ensure I had the financial resources to educate my children. AT&T was nasty when it was a monopoly. Now it is nice since it has competition. Who runs school districts? Parents? Teachers? The administration? The Board? "Unions run the schools."

Crank introduced the four panel members who were each invited to give some opening remarks:

Hugh Hewitt is an author, law professor and broadcast journalist. Both Hewitt and Kelly are talk show hosts on 710 KNUS. Hewitt is the author of "A Mormon in the White House?" [See <http://www.amazon.com/Mormon-White-House-Things-American/dp/159698502X>]

According to Hewitt, the worst school district in the world is the Los Angeles Unified School District [or was the Compton Unified School District the worst?] Hewitt describes Compton as a "failed school district where the children are prisoners [of the union].

[Read about the LAUSD and union interaction yourself:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Unified_School_District;

The CUSD is discussed here:



<http://www.laweekly.com/related/to/Compton+Unified+School+District/> The articles about Compton do say that “The California Teachers Association (CTA) has run a tireless negative campaign against the Parent Trigger law, arguing that it might be used by billionaires to hand schools over to charter companies. Because nonprofit Parent Revolution receives much of its funding from charter-school advocates such as [Bill Gates](#) and [Eli Broad](#), CTA has tried to paint the nonprofit as a corporate mouthpiece. However, the articles also say that it is Democrats who assisted parents in their fight to start a charter school: “By September [2010], three well-organized, sophisticated Democrats with major portfolios in politics, under the name Parent Revolution, had swooped into Compton to give the fledgling law a test run. The nonprofit Parent Revolution, led by directors [Ben Austin](#), [Gabe Rose](#) and [Pat DeTemple](#), runs on donations from charity titans like [Bill Gates](#). Diane Ravitch doesn’t believe that Bill Gates has the solution to our education problems either.]”

Hewitt said that the “original choice” was parochial schools [where Hewitt got his K-12 education]. He was always hearing his teachers say, “Do you know how much your parents are sacrificing [to send you to school]?” Hewitt praised K.I.P.P. (Knowledge Is Power Program). [KIPP began in 1994 when teachers [Dave Levin](#) and [Mike Feinberg](#) completed their [Teach For America](#) commitment and launched a program for [fifth graders](#) in a public school in inner-city [Houston, Texas](#). Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_Is_Power_Program]

Hewitt said, “Union’s are moral entities. Until unions are broken...” Then Hewitt gave out some numbers: in Colorado, the average spent is \$11,000 per student. The average class size is 25. Teachers salary is what? \$50,000? \$60,000? [For 2010-11, total program funding for K-12 education was cut 2.6 percent, dropping the state’s average per-pupil funding from \$7,078 to \$6,813. For 2011-12, total program funding was cut another 4.2 percent, dropping the average per-pupil funding another \$345 to \$6,468. That’s the lowest state average since 2006-07. Meanwhile, enrollment in Colorado schools continues to grow and is projected this year to surpass 800,000 students. Source: Great Ed Newsletter. DCSD 2011/2012 budgeted income: \$463,847,858; General Fund Alloc per pupil = \$7213 (59299 students) for a total of \$7822 per pupil from all sources. DCSD 2011/2012 budgeted expenses: \$415,518,354; General Fund Alloc per pupil = \$6392 (59298 students) for a total of \$7007 per pupil from all sources. Source: DCSD Financial Plan and Budget Fiscal Year 2011/2012 Executive Summary. For the purpose of teacher FTE calculation in Douglas County, the average figure \$71800 is used which includes medical insurance and PERA. Source: SAC Meeting.]

Bob Schaffer, CD4 CDE BOE Member, was introduced next. In his introductory comments, Schaffer said that we must be well educated to manage and govern our country. It is Milton Freidman’s 100th Birthday. Freidman is known for his Cost & Quality Matrix.

- If I spend my money on you – Low Q; Low C

- If I spend my money on me – High Q; Low C
- If I spend your money on me – High Q; High C
- If I spend your money on you – Low Q; High C

[Therefore, if Bob's children's education is being funded by money from taxpayers, he will want the highest quality at the highest cost. However, Bob thinks, like Friedman, that somehow tax dollars allocated to children via vouchers become HIS money, and therefore he will spend HIS money on HIS children and get the highest quality for the lowest cost. It is very convoluted thinking. The money from taxpayers is a windfall to Bob's family. Therefore, he will spend it more wisely? Voucher dollars is, and will remain, in the category of "money that comes from you (taxpayers) that I spend on me" in the Friedman CQ matrix.



		On Whom Money is Spent	
		Yourself	Someone Else
Whose Money is Spent	Yours	Economize and seek highest value	Economize, but don't seek highest value
	Someone Else's	Don't economize, but seek highest value	Don't economize and don't seek highest value

Source: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RDMdc5r5z8> **The 4 Ways to Spend Money by Milton Friedman from "Free to Choose"**. Friedman says that in schools we are spending someone else's (taxpayer's) money on someone else. He comes to this conclusion for all welfare-like programs. I prefer to call warfare-like programs "sharing." But that would be too altruistic for a Republican ideology.]

Schaffer's comments continued: "Public schools are a unionized, governed, bureaucratized monopoly." "Charter schools have driven up the quality of public schools." [Not sure what the measure of "quality" is. Charter schools have made public school class sizes smaller.]

Parents and grandparents have the foremost right to guide the upbringing of their children – not teachers. “We want to trust a government worker to direct the upbringing of our children?” “We surround our children with family love. Government can’t do that.” “Unless we have choice, how we can spend our money on ourselves, [we are trapped letting government workers teach our children].

Moderator: “Douglas County is in the heart of the battle for school choice in Colorado.” [What he meant was “battle for vouchers” since Douglas County has lots of choice options already.]

Therefore, the next member of the panel was **Dan Gerken**, Vice President of the Douglas County School Board. Dan said that the Board is unanimous for school choice – the more choices the better – not a monopoly. Douglas has 70 public schools, 11 charter schools, as well as online schools, and magnet schools. The proposed voucher program would allow 500 students to attend private schools. The court has deemed the voucher program illegal. That decision is being appealed. The DC BOE will prevail.



The last member of the panel was **Dick Morris**, political consultant. His opening remarks included a comment about President Obama’s State of the Union Address. He said the President was proposing that we buy only U.S. made cars, then Morris added, “and we [government] pick the car for you.” That would be analogous to how the government chooses a school for your children.

Morris ended his comments by saying that schools need the ability to fire bad teachers and pay good teachers. We also need to be able to customize what schools teach and “close empty schools.”

Next came questions delivered by text to the moderator.

Q: The US spends more money on education than any other country, so why are we in trouble?

A: [Dick] We began to increase money for schools in the 1970s. In the 1980s, more competency tests and standards were added. In the 2000s, NCLB laws to ID failing schools were implemented. Nothing has worked.

Let everyone experiment. Compete in a free market, like good cars and good washing machines. [It is interesting that Morris compares education the purchase of a car or washing machine.]

Q:

A: [Hugh] The teachers’ union stopped choice in Washington, D.C.

Q: Aren’t public schools harmed by moving dollars to private schools?



A: [Bob] Bologna. Fairness is measured between individuals, not buildings. Dollars do the most good for children. Don't believe the impact on public schools. If they were allowed to compete, they would thrive.

A: [Dan] Vouchers are a win/win. For example: If the District gets \$6000 for John and \$6000 for Suzy from taxpayers, and John decides he wants to go to a private school, then we give \$4500 to John's school of choice and the district keeps the other \$1500 for Suzy. That is more per pupil funding for the District and lower class sizes. [That is the story the DCSD BOE has been spouting for a solid year now. If you say something enough times, people may begin to believe it is true. However, as details about the voucher program began to emerge, it turns out that most of the extra money would be used to hire staff to manage the voucher program and the rest would serve as insurance to schools harmed by a severe reduction in students.]

Q:

A: [Hugh or Dick?] There is no problem that breaking the power of the teachers' union would not solve. Senile, crazy, abusive teachers cannot be fired. Union contracts won't let them be fired. There are teachers that sit in rooms all day that the district can't get rid of. In New York, 4000 teachers had to be laid off. But the Legislature would not let "bad" teachers to be laid off. Instead, young teachers were laid off. [It has been shown that teachers do not reach their best performance until they have been taught at least 3-5 years.]

Q: What motivates a teacher to be in a Union?

A: [Hugh or Dick?] Retirement benefits. [I about choked when he said that.] These are the great "Golden Handcuffs." Remedy... address retirement. Tell teachers to "strive to maintain" after they have worked 3-5 years. Transition to a new system. In order to break the union, lose retirement.

A: [Bob] Unions are a terrible problem; retirement benefits; professionalism liability. As bad as unions are, we have allowed unions to take hold. Unions back candidates all the way from the BOE to Congress. We need to beat them with what Americans care more about.

A: [Dick] Hold BOE Elections on Election Day. Unions lose power when more people vote. [Interesting. Republican policy usually favors fewer voters. DCSD BOE elections are held on Election Day.]

A: [Bob] The left should support school choice since disadvantaged are helped. The unions won't let them. The left's power is sustained by unions. The SCIU, nurses' and teachers' unions dominate elections. 7.5% of the nation belongs to a union. 47% of government employees belong to a union. The left is totally dependent on union contributions. A portion of all union dues is given to a political party. [This is pure Republican dogma. The Republican Party is sustained by bank contributions – must be why Dems are always after more bank regulation and Reps are always demonizing unions.] So it's not just the union's power over schools.

A: [Hugh] In school board elections, union backed candidates win by default. Two years ago, there was organized opposition and the union back candidates lost by a vote of 60/40 in favor of Republican-backed candidates in Douglas County. [No such thing as non-partisan elections here!]

Q:

A: [Bob] We need to break the stranglehold of the union. Licenses are not relevant for teachers to teach. Ph.D.s teach at Schaffer's charter school. They don't have a union contract. It is absurdity to pay good and bad teachers the same. Pay should be a function of performance. Bill 191 is not perfect, but we need to erode tenure. \$50,000 is a good average merit pay. Master teachers get \$70,000 and new teachers get \$35,000. [Sounds like a tenure-based pay scale to me.]

A: [Hugh] If we study Massachusetts (MA) Schools, it is not class size or money that makes them the best in the country, it is the quality of their teachers. The only thing a child needs is a good teacher. We all remember 1, 2, or 3 teachers that impacted us. We have to have choice in order to choose our teachers [for our children]. [After looking at 2011 MA data, it appears the MA has very few charter or magnet schools at the elementary level and that the average class size is close to 15 (<http://www.schooldigger.com/go/MA/schoolrank.aspx>) so to say that class size is not a factor in MA scores may not be correct.]

Moderator: What are three talking points that the audience can take with them to help with the discussion on choice?

A: [Dan] 1) We tried everything else. [Not true. We have not tried a curriculum-based plan like they use in college, uniforms, and separating girls and boys in middle school.]

A: [Dick] If schools in other districts are terrible, students will move to your district. [That could create a problem.] We can't use "unions" in public as a talking point. 1) It is a human right to choose. 2) One size does not fit all—market strategy.

A: [Bob] 1) Quote Freidman: "I want to spend my money on me." 2) Quality teachers should not be paid the same as bad teachers 3) Advocate for local control—it should be no further than your kitchen table.

A: [Hugh] Every year Time Magazine lists the 100 best schools in the U.S. A school can only be great if there is choice. [I have looked at this list, and that does not seem to be true. In most cases, the best school had the highest funding.]

A: [Dan] It [choice] is the only way to achieve quality.

A: [Dick] Why can't we choose a high school like we do a college?

Q: What can a public school employee do?

A: [Hugh] It is hard to be in the school system. It is a moral decision to join a union. Tell the union you don't want your dues to be used in politics.

A: [Dick] Push for merit pay. In Arkansas the AFT tolerates pay for performance. [In Douglas County, the AFT has had a pay-for-performance program in the district for about 6 years.] We can't persuade unions to give up tenure and retirement benefits.

Q: What next?

A: [?] We need to stop running our schools like the Soviet Union. Choice is the future. [1) There is no "Soviet Union." 2) The Russian Federation has the smallest class sizes of all the large countries and an occasional study ranks them higher than the U.S. in some test scores. See link to 2006 PISA report or more recently the 2009 report.]

A: [Dick] This is a rebirth of Public Education. It will attract better teachers and force public schools to change.

A: [Bob] Public Education will not go away. Behind every successful reform are people who are persistent and fight as hard as they can. Defy the union. Vote for children.

Summary

- 1) Unions are being blamed unilaterally for bad schools [the DCSD BOE says that DC schools are great and has not said that the Union is a problem].
- 2) Choice allows the parent to choose his child's teacher [not school].
- 3) Taxpayer dollars are needed to fund choice-based education systems

Fact: Choice-based educational systems are the most expensive in the world. Taxpayer obligations always increase as more and more students are funded under choice systems.

Comments: The problem is NOT the union or teacher tenure or teacher retirement benefits. The problem is that whenever taxpayer dollars are used to pay for anything, the government entity controlling the money is obligated to get the biggest bang for the buck. Technically, for schools, that would mean a minimum curriculum with the fewest number of teachers and greatest number of students in the fewest number of schools. But parents and grandparents demand more than that. They want all things taught in school from math to music, from reading to football, from writing to woodshop. They want class sizes to be small so that children get the individual "loving" attention from the teacher that they find at home. They want school buildings that can be used as community centers for sports and meetings. They want all their children to go to college and earn lots of money in this global economy.

Tenure was offered to teachers as an incentive to be a teacher long before there were unions. Teachers' unions were formed to protect women from being fired as a result of getting married or getting pregnant. Times have changed and the world is now comfortable with women in the workforce – a direct result of WWII. Since teachers are now one of the most popular professions in the U.S. for men as well as women, unions may need to cooperate with new standards that allow a teacher to be fired with cause, and merit pay programs differentiating teachers based on factors in addition to experience. Unions are still needed to protect those who would be fired for no cause or become subject to unjust merit pay programs such a male teachers being paid a higher salary for the same experience and performance as female teachers. Unions are required to keep the American middle-class stable, insured, and reasonably paid.

Panel members kept saying that money is not the issue. Well it is the issue. Educating all students in this country is expensive and it is up to those who do not have children in school to be willing to provide the best education money can buy for the upcoming generations. There are some things that could be done to help

bring down cost. Removing choice is one of them. Note that the best-educated children on the planet are in Asia, where the average class size is 40. The U.S. doesn't even build schools with classrooms that can hold 40 students. We need to examine the data regarding class-size.

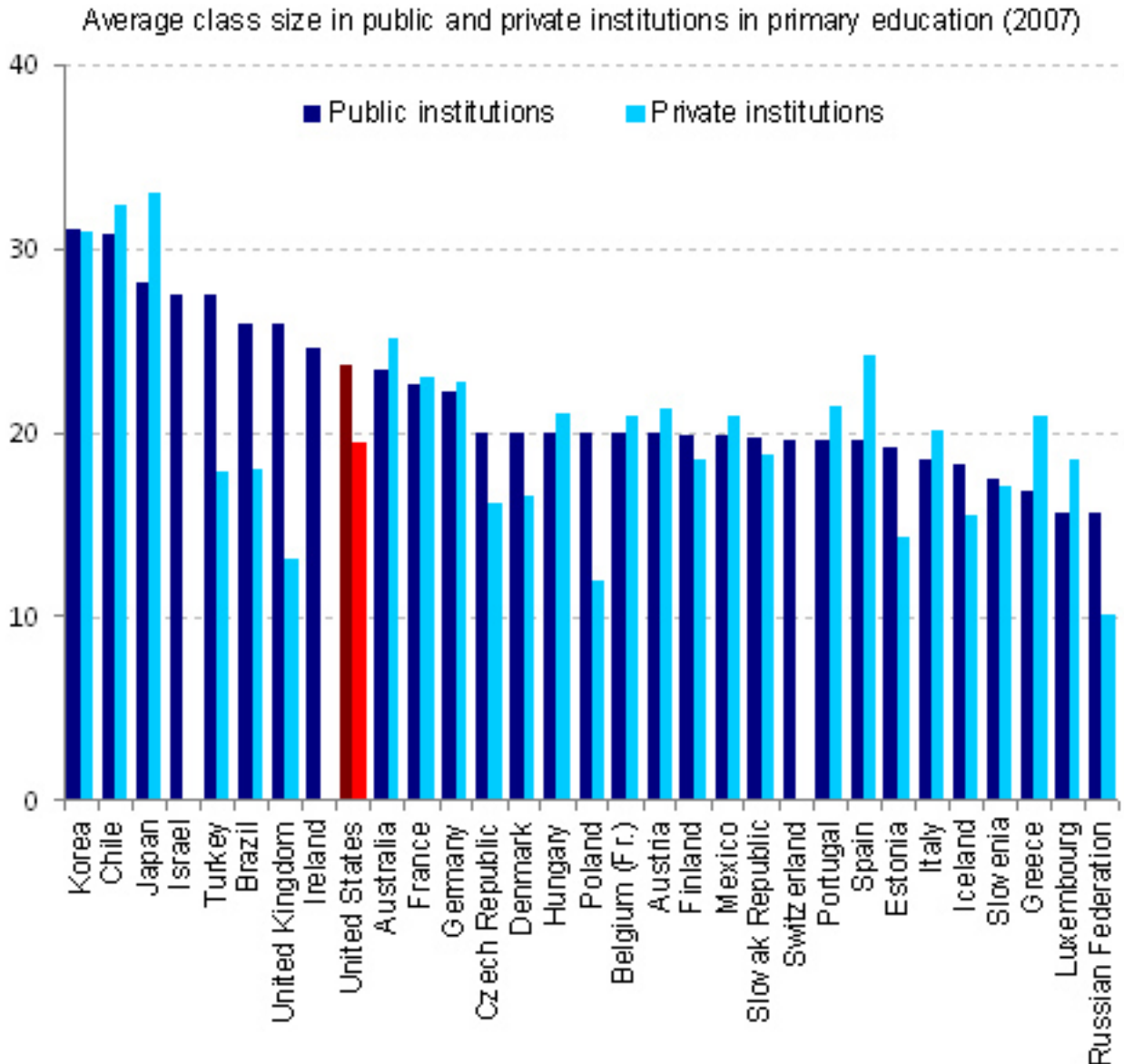
September 11, 2009, 4:59 pm

Class Size Around the World

By [CATHERINE RAMPPELL](#)

<http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/11/class-size-around-the-world/>

Note that some of the countries with [some of the world's highest achieving student bodies](#) — like Korea and Japan — have the biggest class sizes. Perhaps this has to do with cultural differences; societies with Confucian roots may have stricter hierarchies within the classroom, so perhaps it's easier (or more expected) for a single teacher to manage a bigger group of students. But presumably there are other explanations, too. (Readers?)



From the 2006 PISA Report

- The number of students at Level 6 cannot be reliably predicted from a country's overall performance. Korea was among the highest-performing countries on the PISA science test, in terms of students' performance, with an average of 522 score points, while the United States performed below the OECD average, with a score of 489. Nevertheless, the United States and Korea had similar percentages of students at Level 6 (Tables 2.1a, 2.1c)
- Over one in five students in Finland (21%) and over one in six in New Zealand (18%) reached at least Level 5 (OECD average 9%). In Japan, Australia and Canada, and the partners Hong Kong-China and Chinese Taipei, this figure was between 14% and 16% (Table 2.1a).