



We have nothing to fear but fearmongers themselves

By Jim Waters

Fearmongering often becomes a technique successfully employed by opponents of good policy that threatens their comfort zone. Their goal: Protect the status quo by playing on fear.

For example, big spenders in Washington, D.C. – both parties included – succeeded in preventing younger workers from controlling their retirement savings by claiming such a plan would break the bank for those already retired. Ironically, many of these big spenders wrote the checks for pork-barrel projects that helped drain Social Security. That shameful behavior made the problem worse.

The so-called Social Security Trust Fund doesn't have the assets now to pay off obligations – IOUs that will increase as more workers retire, leaving fewer contributors to pay the tab. The fearmongers offer few solutions beyond “everyone is going to have to share in the pain.”

That's code for “tax increases.” Now, that's scary – especially during an economic recession.

Fearmongers also shine when it comes to free-trade agreements. America loses too many jobs through outsourcing, they say in opposition of free trade. Yet, they rarely mention that U.S. companies *always* outsource *and* in-source jobs.

As an example, a new Cato Institute report on free trade by Daniel Griswold highlights what happened at Caterpillar Inc., a well-known Illinois company that makes earth-moving equipment. Between 2005 and 2007, the company enjoyed booming worldwide sales, his report stated. During this time, Caterpillar earned 63 percent of its sales abroad, which resulted in an increase of nearly 7,000 jobs in the U.S.

That domestic job growth serves as a testament to “fear not” the free-trade fearmongers.

Meanwhile, education remains a favorite target of fearmongers, who often turn out to be nothing more than naïve legislators unaware of how bureaucrats and labor bosses at teachers unions play them.

For example, a favorite argument propagated by education fearmongers: making public education compete for students and money through school choice would destroy Kentucky schools. They would also have us believe that school choice would skim “the cream of the crop” students from already struggling public schools, leaving only failing, poor and minority students behind.

But a new report written by John Garen, chairman of the University of Kentucky Department of Economics, should bring peace to hearts stained by the fearmongering forces opposed to school choice. (Read the entire report at www.bipps.org.)

Garen presents evidence of school-choice success from several states and cities where parents determine which schools get the students and the money that accompanies them.

For example, Michigan allows charter schools. These public schools promise to perform at a higher level in exchange for freedom from teacher unions and bureaucratic red tape. These hurdles often tie the hands

of principals and teachers. Michigan school districts that lost more than 6 percent of their students to charter schools “responded to the competitive threat” by improving their scores in math and reading.

As for school-choice opponents, who scare the public with claims that it results in the “resegregation” of schools, research from the U.S. Department of Education shows that minorities comprise a higher percentage of charter-school student populations than their traditional public-school counterparts.

In fact, legislators can write laws in a way that targets school-choice funding for students from lower-income and disadvantaged households.

So what do the fearmongers fear? They fear that competition will shine the light on failing Kentucky schools, inadequate teachers and wasteful spending to the point that parents and their legislative representatives will insist that failing schools improve or close.

They don’t want the commonwealth to get serious about educating kids.

Kentuckians should fear that.

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