

OUR OPINION

Dealing with judgment day

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Steve Williams

By no means are the financial problems caused by the trustee/union collusion that's gone on at Victor Valley College for so these many years peculiar to California generally or the High Desert in particular.

Consider, for example, what's happened in Wisconsin. In that state two years ago the governor, Scott Walker, attempted to reform Wisconsin's relationship with public unions, the strongest of which was the teachers' unions. The resulting firestorm engulfed Walker, the school system, and voters, but the final outcome — Gov. Walker stood firm and handily survived a recall fight — decimated union membership.

Recall that under Gov. Walker's 2011 union reform law, a majority of union members had to vote each year to recertify the union as their representative. If less than 50 percent of members vote to keep the union and pay union dues, the union effectively loses its ability to bargain for wages, according to a Thursday editorial in the Wall Street Journal. Result? A majority of public union members are opting out of their organizations, and unions across the state have been decertified. In 2011 and 2012, some 13 percent of 207 Wisconsin school districts and 39 municipal and state units were decertified. Given a choice, union members took a walk. That has saved the state's taxpayers nearly \$2 billion in two years.

Shift your attention to California. Here, the same problems involving unions and the public purse ensue. Consider CalSTRS (California State Teachers Retirement System). That system has an estimated pension debt of \$167 billion. That's more than two and a half times what CalSTRS estimated was its unfunded liabilities just a year ago. The change, according to the Orange County Register, came because of CalSTRS' adoption of new rules by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, which use the more rigorous methods of private-sector accounting instead of generous government estimates.

As with VVC's situation, Marcia Fritz, president of the California Foundation for Fiscal Responsibility, a pension reform group, said "The new standards show that, if more money is going out than coming in, you're going to run out of money." Sound familiar? You bet it does, because that's what's been happening with VVC's budget.

The Register notes that Gov. Jerry Brown and the Legislature did not include anything to reduce the \$167 billion shortfall in CalSTRS' pension fund. If they had, the state's supposedly "balanced" budget would have been thrown out of balance, dampening all the governor's celebrations of how, as he says, "California is back."

California's not "back," it's merely postponed judgment day. Fortunately, a reconstituted board of trustees at VVC appears to have gotten that message from the public, and to save the school's accreditation seems prepared to deal with judgment day now and not later. Good.