

OUR OPINION

Follow the money

July 16, 2013

As one letter writer points out today, Victor Valley College's problems are centered on money and how the board of trustees has been derelict in the past in determining how taxpayer funds have been used — or perhaps a better word would be misused. The school's current probationary status was imposed by the Accrediting Commission on California Junior Colleges (ACCJC), whose chief concern is the school's shaky financing. And we believe, based on a report on those finances from the Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), that ACCJC probation will end only if and when the school has submitted a responsible and workable plan to put its financial affairs in order.

A related problem at the school is filling a vacancy on the board of trustees created by the recent resignation of Michael Krause. In the past, such vacancies were filled by board appointment, and at least two current trustees want to use that method again. But two other trustees disagree, and so deadlock has ensued.

One trustee, Dennis Henderson, was quoted in a Daily Press story Monday as saying the problem could be easily solved by bringing past board member Joe Range back. Mr. Range was defeated in his re-election bid last fall by Joseph Brady. Mr. Henderson wants Mr. Range back because Mr. Range "knows how the board runs," and bringing him back would be the "easiest and best way" to bring the board to full strength.

Mr. Henderson opposes a special election because "money (at VVC) is tight right now." A special election to fill the vacancy is projected to cost \$150,000.

Which gets us to another of the letter writers, who tells us that the school's approximately 120 full time teachers (all members of the California Teachers Association) consume some \$15 million of the school's yearly budget of \$50 million. Some of those faculty members are paid in excess of \$200,000 a year, not including benefits. That's depressing news to taxpayers, the vast majority of whom work for far less — if they have a job at all.

And who do you suppose agreed to such blatantly excessive teacher salaries in union negotiations in the past? Mr. Henderson was on the board then, and Mr. Range was president, and both — along with John Pinkerton — have been, in our view, far too compliant to union demands. That's what's gotten VVC into such trouble, yet Mr. Henderson sees nothing wrong with further compliance with CTA demands and shortchanging taxpayers in the process. Spending \$150,000 on a special election — which might very well result in adding another financially sensible member to the board — seems like small potatoes in light of \$200,000 teacher salaries.

If Mr. Henderson were interested in saving the public money, he would lend his support to a common sense, bottom line approach to VVC budgeting, and VVC might not be on probation at all.

An Aug. 8 trustees meeting is to determine the best course in bringing the board to full membership. We hope for two things; that it's open to the public, and that its proceedings are video-taped and the tape made available to the public at large. Let's have, at long last, some transparency about the goings-on at VVC.

Steve Williams