

OUR OPINION

## Power Play

August 13, 2013

In a letter to the editor today (see elsewhere on the page) Tom Pinard blames the deadlock on the Victor Valley Board of Trustees over replacing a resigned trustee and bring the board back to full strength (five members) on two union-backed trustees.

For those who think this might be far-fetched (and apparently there are supporters of the two who believe they're acting in the public interest), consider that the two trustees are either union members now, or have been in the past. Dennis Henderson is retired from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, a unionized organization. John Pinkerton is a guidance counselor at Victorville's Silverado High School, where the California Teachers Association holds sway.

These trustees vote on contracts between VVC and the CTA. So whose side do you suppose they favor when it comes to considering salaries, benefits, work schedules and the like, all issues subject to negotiation between the college administration and the union? Taxpayers, or the union? Is there a doubt in your mind? Not in ours, and certainly not based on the evidence.

As we've noted before, salaries and benefits for fulltime academic employees at VVC — all CTA members — seem wildly out of balance with the pay and benefits of most Victor Valley residents. VVC's website lists fulltime teachers' salaries as beginning at \$150,083 per year, plus a benefit package of \$24,278. That totals \$174,361. The top level of a fulltime instructor is listed at \$195,925 with an accompanying benefit package of \$28,046, which totals \$223,971. (These figures are from 2011, so probably are lower than present day figures, and are surely lower than they'd be in the future with a CTA-dominated majority on the trustee board.)

How many VVC students (we're assuming normal college ages, say from 18 to 26) do you suppose are in High Desert families with yearly incomes in excess of \$174,361? Average wages in the High Desert are in the high \$20,000 range.

The deadlock at VVC concerns not only control of the current administration, but of future decisions over salaries, benefits, class schedules, curriculum and the like. The CTA obviously wants that vital fifth trustee so that future decisions will be 3-2 in their favor.

Mr. Pinard thinks the solution to this is to divide the district into five "wards" so that future elected trustees will be responsible to an isolated segment of residents. He opposes at-large elections because he fears the power of the CTA to influence them with vast injections of campaign cash. That's legitimate, but with a five-ward system, the CTA could concentrate its cash and door-to-door canvassing on just three areas to elect a majority. That would be worse.

Meanwhile, time's slipping away, with just a couple of weeks left before the trustees are forced to call a special election to fill that fifth seat. We're beginning to believe that's what the CTA is after. They're already blaming that possibility on the opposition — you know, those in favor of taxpayers and students.

VVC has been under CTA control for years, and where has that gotten us?

Steve Williams