

VVC Trustees and the CTA

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I read with great consternation the ongoing disaster that Victor Valley College has become. As a former trustee, clerk and vice president of the board, I think I can offer an insider's perspective on the current issues. I was appointed to the board in June of 2009 to fill the seat formerly held by Dr. Bettye Underhill. At that time, the board followed the policy of requesting applications from the community, interviewing applicants and appointing one of them to fill the vacancy until the next scheduled election.

After the November 2010 election, there was another vacancy on the board due to a resignation. Without a meeting of the board, Dennis Henderson and Joe Range determined, along with the board attorney, Jeff Morris, that they would accept applications from the community but only interview those candidates they chose to interview. This was based on a scorecard ranking of 0-5 points per board member, because Mr. Henderson said that it would take too long to interview everyone. As a result of this, Mr. Range changed his score cards to ensure that the candidate of his choice would be interviewed.

Now I see that Mr. Henderson and John Pinkerton are seeking to simply ignore board policy by appointing the highest vote getter who did not win in the previous election — something Mr. Morris said could not be done in 2009 and 2010. I assume that they are attempting to do this now in an effort to re-appoint Mr. Range even though the voters rejected his bid for re-election.

Mr. Range served on the board for a number of years including numerous terms as president. During that time the college was unable and unwilling to get its fiscal house in order. The administration, when I was appointed, was complicit in allowing the California Teachers Association (full-time faculty) to dictate most terms of their contracts. I suggested to then-president Dr. Robert Silverman, along with the members of the board, that we request the CTA membership to contribute a percentage of the costs of benefits and, further, that we cap future benefit payments from the district to CTA membership. I also suggested that we cap maximum pay to CTA members at 150 percent of their step and column pay. It was determined by Mr. Henderson, Mr. Range and Angeles Valles (now a member of the Victorville City Council) that it would be impractical and unwise to request any contribution from CTA membership or undergo any effort to rein in the costs associated with CTA members.

Consequently, we as a board made the incredibly difficult decision to lay off a number of CSEA (non-teaching staff) members. The rationale was that the district was fiscally unable to meet its current obligations. The rationale was accurate, but the prescription was simply not enough. The vast majority of fiscal resources flow to the 120 CTA members of VVC.

While I was on the board and while running for election, I met regularly with the part-time faculty leadership and CSEA leadership. Members of both leadership teams told me that if I would support a raise for their members, they would support my candidacy. I suggested that the district could not afford to give a raise without an off-setting reduction in expense for CTA members. As a result, I was told that the unions chose to endorse Michael Krause, because he

had agreed to support a raise. I read with interest that Mr. Krause said in a letter to the editor that part-time faculty deserved a raise.

Now the district is considering spending up to \$150,000 to violate its own policy. I certainly hope that trustees Joseph Brady and Lorrie Denson prevail over Mr. Pinkerton and Mr. Henderson, who seem to share the CTA lack of concern for anything other than themselves.

The economic health of the High Desert is dependent on the health of VVC. As the college currently faces accreditation issues regarding its fiscal stability it is critical that the district do everything that it can to be good stewards of the resources that the tax payers have provided. This should include minimizing unnecessary costs such as a \$150,000 special election and seeking to engage the CTA in a meaningful dialogue regarding the future of the college. This dialogue should include CTA membership contributing financially to the benefit of the entire college community.

Chris Mollenkamp is a former trustee of Victor Valley College.