

OUR OPINION

VVC's troubles

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The troubles at Victor Valley College, which have been building for at least the last seven years, remain unresolved, despite protestations to the contrary from some people close to the situation.

They remain unresolved, in our view, because the Board of Trustees lacks leadership, and that lack has resulted in a lack of leadership on the administrative end, as exemplified best by the years during which Christopher O'Hearn presided as president of the school. Mr. O'Hearn, by most accounts, was not only ineffective in the post but was periodically and systematically absent from duty. When he was available, he was far too sympathetic to the California Federation of Teachers, the union that rules the school's full-time faculty members.

What direction did Mr. O'Hearn receive from the trustees? If present conditions at the school are a guide, either it wasn't much, or it was wrong.

It is obvious the CFT rules the college. The board of trustees has given in — apparently automatically — to the CFT's demands for at least a decade, particularly regarding salary and benefits. That's obvious to anyone bothering to read an exhaustive report on the college's financial condition prepared by the Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team (FCMAT), an agency called in two years ago to evaluate the college's financial standing. FCMAT was called in, apparently, as a result of the probationary status the school was placed on by the state's Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC).

FCMAT had this to say about salaries and benefits enjoyed by CFT members: "The district pays the full cost of the premium for medical, dental, vision and life insurance at a composite rate for each full-time faculty member and classified staff member as well as for most classified staff members working at least 20 hours per week. The district has an insurance committee, but there is no financial incentive for an individual to move to the lowest-cost plan or help contain the rising cost of premiums."

And that's just the benefits.

In November 2008, Victor Valley voters approved a bond measure (Measure JJ) dedicated mostly to eliminating the school's debt. It hasn't worked, nor have funds the college is now receiving from the passage last fall of Proposition 30 by state voters.

FCMAT notes the school remains in debt, but worse, is making no progress toward retiring that debt. The report asks and answers: "Is the district avoiding deficit spending? No. Has the district controlled deficit spending over the past two fiscal years? No. Has the board approved a plan to eliminate deficit spending? No."

This is all coming to a head because the ACCJC is to decide in October whether VVC has corrected the deficiencies that caused the probation in the first place.

It's also coming to a head because of the election of Joseph Brady to the board last fall. Mr. Brady has, with help from a number of people worried about the school's immediate future, made the valley's residents begin to recognize that there's a huge problem.

Peter Allan, named interim superintendent/ president to replace Mr. O'Hearn, tells us there's only one problem left on the ACCJC's mandated list of needed corrections to end the probation. In the weeks remaining before the ACCJC revisits, we hope — along with the rest of the Victor Valley — Mr. Allan's

view is correct. If it isn't, VVC could ultimately go the way of George Air Force Base and become part of the valley's past, instead of its future.