

The Incredible Invisible Elephant

It's all about money. It's always about money. Money and power that is- because in politics the two terms are usually synonymous. For Alabama politicians it's all about YOUR money and their need to take it from you in order to satisfy their major campaign contributors. This in turn will help them maintain their stranglehold on power. Our form of government is supposed to have checks and balances to keep this abuse of power under control. But in Montgomery the “check and balance system” could be more accurately described as, “on balance the power goes to whoever writes the biggest check.”

So where, as the title implies, is this Invisible Elephant? Why, he is right there in the room, plain as day, for any rational person to see, but due to the corruptive influence of money and power, the Legislature refuses to acknowledge it. They close their eyes. They turn their backs. They walk around it. Watching from the gallery, one sometimes thinks that when debating the Alabama budget the “Great Seal of Alabama” hanging on the chamber wall should be taken down and replaced by the Japanese symbol of “The Three Monkeys”: one with his hands over his eyes, one with his hands over his ears and one with his hands over his mouth. See no Common Core cost. Hear no Common Core cost. Speak no Common Core cost. The real Elephant in the room is the Education budget and the staggering future cost of Common Core! Yet nobody asks for a true accounting of what this massive socialist expansion of Alabama education will cost- not just to the future education of our children but to the taxpayers of Alabama. NOBODY! This is amazing when you consider that approximately six billion dollars (over 75%) of all taxes raised and spent in Alabama go to education, most of the so-called growth taxes.... all go to education. Yet, all the attention has been devoted to the 25% appropriated to the General Fund, which pays for everything else: bridges, roads, state police and all other state services. And more importantly for elected officials, I suppose, that 25% also includes the “take home” money for their district, money that helps politicians get re-elected. So while the Legislature simply ignores the “Elephant in the room” they squabble endlessly over the “peanuts.” Talk about the tail wagging the dog! Endless hours have been devoted to the ABC Board and other mundane issues while ignoring the real threat hanging over us all- the future unbridled appetite of Alabama education under Common Core. Unless turned back, the staggering costs of testing, data collection, and infrastructure will simply outstrip the states' capacity to pay. Common Core will bankrupt Alabama! Unless of course, taxes are drastically increased.

There has been one notable exception to this inability to see the Invisible Elephant. Governor Bentley has seen it. The day after the November 2014 elections the Governor saw him. Apparently not having to run for re-election again allows one to actually see the Elephant, maybe even to hear the Elephant, but even the Governor dares not talk about the monster. No, that would be just too frightening to Alabama taxpayers and all politicians know that citizens should not be trusted with the truth. Why- they might actually want to rethink the whole Common Core issue. They might decide it was just too costly-that would certainly anger the major campaign contributors and rock the money boat. No, this had to be kept under wraps.

So the Governor and the leadership of the Legislature are both using smoke and mirrors to draw your attention away from the fact that, in future, huge tax increases will be necessary to raise money for Common Core. This is necessary in order to satisfy the demands of their main campaign contributors, namely the Chamber of Commerce and the Business Council of Alabama. In spite of the Governor's scary statements about dire consequences to the old folks, the children, the state parks and the premature release of prisoners (pay no attention to the man behind the curtain please) has no one else noticed the proposed one hundred million dollar bond (debt) issue to borrow money for infrastructure

for Common Core? Has no one else noticed that, once again, property state wide is being re-appraised in order to raise your property taxes. Has no one noticed the Legislatures' attempt to raise from three dollars to over two hundred dollars a barrel (over 5,000%) the tax on lubricants used by farmers and truckers to grow and transport your food and other materials to market, an increase which will have to be passed directly on to you in the form of increased prices when you, the consumer, buy these products. Apparently there are many other sneaky taxes in store for you. All this, of course, so you won't know about the hidden increases and hold them accountable next election. All this, in spite of what they say, to feed the Invisible Elephant in the room, the Elephant that if left unchecked, will eventually be literally eating Alabama tax payers out of house and home.

So what will this monster actually cost to feed? Nobody is willing to say. When asked the Department of Education just stonewalls. But what we know so far is that Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice has already stolen, pardon me, the polite word is re-purposed, over seventy seven million dollars from the gutting of two very good and effective programs, the Alabama Reading Initiative (number one in the nation) and the Alabama Math Initiative (number three in the nation). And next years education budget contains an additional ten million dollars on top of the ten million already allocated for Common Core based testing. This amount is only for two subjects and for only a few grades. What will the cost be when ALL SUBJECTS.... IN ALL GRADES... K-12 are included? No one will say, but I have heard estimates of over an additional one billion dollars a year. People, there is no more money left to re-purpose (steal) therefore the only remaining sources of money are to either take it from Alabama taxpayers or by the state borrowing more money which we will have to repay. A one hundred million dollar bond (debt) issue for infrastructure was the very first bill filed this year. Yet the Leadership of the Legislature swears that they just can't see the Elephant!

Understand, this is NOT the fault of the grass-roots Republican Party itself. The Republican Executive Committee which is composed of about four hundred members- mostly the local party leadership and the folks who represent the wishes of the people within the party as a whole- have passed resolutions calling for the "Repeal of Common Core" by huge majorities three years in a row. The so-called "Tea Party," which the Legislature seems to think is comprised of anyone and everyone who opposes their un-constitutional behavior, has fought valiantly to repeal Common Core- yet Mike Hubbard and Del Marsh have consciously chosen to ignore the vast majority of both their own party members and their conservative base. The result is that now Alabama has the best Republican Legislature that money can buy- but it is a Legislature that does not represent the will of the people or the party.

Whatever the Legislature does this year it will only amount to a temporary financial band-aid to cover present costs. What about the next year and the years to come? How will they cover it then? Unlike the Federal Government, Alabama can't just print money, it has to come from somewhere.

Prior to Common Core, Alabama had an education system that was working quite well, actually taught American values, and that we could afford. But now, without huge tax increases, Common Core is well on its way to bankrupting the state.

There are none so blind as those who will not see. Maybe the Legislature just doesn't want to see the Elephant. Maybe they fear to look the monster in the eye and think that if they just keep feeding it a little more money it will eventually go away. "The trouble with Socialism," as Margaret Thatcher once quipped, "is that eventually you run out of other peoples' money." In this case the other peoples' money referred to... is yours and mine.

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