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Those who know me will recognize I have been very vocal about key issues that affect our pocket books. Three of them are the poor state of our economy, the lack of governmental fiscal responsibility and deteriorating public safety. I wanted to take a moment to write about another concern. Our declining education system.

There was an email I read entitled "The ranks of the working poor are expanding." It describes the struggles of low-income, working class families and how they are falling behind in economic success. The article states California is number one for workers living in poverty and the trend is increasing. Michele Siqueiros, Executive Director of the Campaign for College Opportunity was the author of the email. I know nothing of her politics. I do know the title is consistent with my own assessment of the subject and how it relates to education.

Although graduation rates vary from district to district, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson reported graduation rates in L.A. Unified is 66 percent and Compton Unified is 57 percent, one of the lowest. Graduation rates for African-Americans jumped up 3 percent last year, but it's still about 13 percentage points below average. We are fortunate in the 48th Assembly District. We have good schools, but we don't live on an island...

I have my opinions about why we lag behind. I know they may be purely anecdotal. I base my opinions on my experiences in gang and youth intervention efforts, conversations with several college administrators and educators and my own research. Many educators at the college level have voiced their frustration about the quality of students enrolled in their colleges. One in particular talked to me about how she was tasked to bring new students up to college standards. She told me her firsthand account of the general lack of life skills and ability to complete college course work in some of her students. We both surmised it is a result of a number of factors that have crept into our K-12 schools. Pure academic structure competes with social distractions and agendas promoted by some school administrators.

My opinion was validated in listening to the GOP weekly address delivered by North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory. He said getting businesses to expand in his state was only half the job. He said "employers now need job-ready workers who have the technical and critical thinking skills that are mandatory in today's workplace." Governor McCrory also stated employers are struggling to find qualified workers. It is something we know is affecting California.

One word; "Reform." I believe the answer lies in the restoration of local control in our schools and more parental control. As we have learned, federal intervention in our education systems for the past several decades has not worked. "No Child Left Behind and now "Common Core" have been controversial federal programs with sketchy results. Central planning has done nothing but impose unfunded mandates on school systems. It has made the administration of our schools expensive and less focused on academics and more on social engineering. State school districts must also have a stable stream of funding. They should not have to borrow money from lending entities while they wait for the state to pay them what is owed to them. (Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes) Above all, parental participation is essential to a good educational outcome. And as voters, we must be engaged in monitoring, advocating and supporting legislation that would promote more local control, reforms and funding.

Common-sense reform cannot begin until we restore the balance of power to us, the people. Nothing is more important in California than to remove "one party rule" in Sacramento.