

The Public Square..... by JC Bowman

Continued from page 20

I am going to try to explain this dropout rate thing one more time. It is claimed by Bradley County that they have a dropout rate of around 10%. Keep in mind that nationally the dropout rate is roughly 30%. My position is, IF we were doing that well we need to get Harvard on the phone immediately and send in researchers to evaluate so that we can duplicate this accomplishment across the nation. Let's look at it this way. I can believe that 90% of the students enrolled in the fall of 2007 in the class of 2008 will graduate on time with their class at Bradley High School and Walker Valley High School. Thus we have a dropout rate of 10%. What I cannot believe is that 90% of the students who enrolled in 2004 in Bradley County Schools graduate on time with their class. Do you believe that 90% of the students enrolled in 2004 are graduating in 2008? Throw in middle school and you begin to get the picture. Then where did these students go?

I believe the number of dropouts is much higher than reported, and has been much higher the last decade. This is not reflective of the current director of schools who I believe has done a good job academically with students, due in large part to the high quality of excellent teachers. It is a systemic problem. School districts report whatever numbers they like, however they want to report them, and there's nobody outside checking to see if these are true or accurate. Sooner or later someone needs to look at: Who is graduating with their class? How do they capture transfers in or out? As a result, we may be ignoring students who drop out before the senior year when they calculate high school completion rates, resulting in inflated graduation rates.

In defense of David Kelley, there have been community-wide rumors that he has a conflict of interest due to his job with Head Start and his role on the Bradley County

School Board. I do not see this as a conflict necessarily, unless he exercises control over Bradley County Schools and uses those resources and classrooms that would go to Bradley County students in favor of Head Start. Which would mean taxpayers would have to pay to add additional classrooms. The other rumor that he may be in violation of the Hatch Act is probably not accurate either, unless he is conducting school board business on Head Start time or place of business. The Hatch Act Unit is located in the Office of Special Counsel, 1730 M Street, N.W., Suite 218, Washington, DC 20036-4505. The website is <http://www.osc.gov/> If I believed for one minute Kelley was in violation of the Hatch Act, rest assured I would personally file a request to have him investigated. I have not done that, nor has anyone to the best of my knowledge. I know that he does need to be careful to separate time and space, his activity under the

Head Start Grant and his activity on the Bradley County School Board.

Finally, I want to touch on arrogance and respect. I think it is critical that we respect the positions that we have established to govern us, but for you fortunate few who hold these elected offices keep in mind you are elected to serve us. You are not lord and master over tax-paying citizens. We are not going to change deep-seated patterns overnight. Change is going to require a lot of citizen oversight and a lot of aggressive action. For example, changing school leadership is the best means we have of changing the culture in our schools. A new director needs a fresh start without the shadow of his predecessor hanging over him. I encourage the school board to give the next director the freedom to implement his agenda and not continue by extending the old regime. But hold this next director accountable. Honest accountability to meaningful standards of conduct are fatal to incompetence and corruption; absolutely and without exception.

Serving on the school board would be an honor, but again it is not an imperial dictatorship allowed to flaunt arrogance. The school board in the past has exercised clinical manipulation of power communitywide, all the while masquerading as a force for universal good. It's a brilliant strategy. Fortunately, the Bradley County Commission is also very clever and they insist on *truthiness*. You know truth that comes from the gut, not self-generated reports and information, or comparison studies from the People's Re-

public of Massachusetts. Using the system resources for political purposes is flat out wrong and needs to end.

So my guess Mr. Kelley is you will like this new commentary even less than the previous piece of writing. An unsolicited piece of advice: if you are going to get upset about words on a page, try adding a little fiber to your diet. Don't get upset, do the right thing. More importantly, don't forget to breathe in, breathe out, repeating as necessary. Welcome to the *Church of the Painful Truth* Mr. Kelley.



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