

Our City

I find myself in transit to Washington D.C. when I normally write this column. It is supposed to be a big deal; Washington Week, for all 57 Teachers Of the Year. It feels less so even this morning as I sit in my room at the Capital Hilton. But, life is what you make of it. And, to the extent possible I will make the most of my time here.

Rodney Robinson who teaches in a youth detention center in Virginia is the National Teacher of the Year, deservedly so. He does amazing work with his students, the juvenile corrections system within his state and his State legislature. Sadly for Rodney and the rest of the Teachers Of the Year this week has become a week filled with politics and turmoil. For each of the 57 of us planning for the week was nearly impossible as everything hinged on the President's and Vice-President's schedules. We were encouraged to make appointments with our legislators. We all did. Then everything changed.

For the first time since before Harry Truman was the President of the United States, the President will neither officiate the induction of the National Teacher Of the Year nor attend the reception following. No, instead we get the antithesis of public education, private school champion, Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. It may be interesting to hear what she says to a group of public school teachers; I won't pre-judge, although what I have heard her say previously on national television does not bode well for what she will say tomorrow. But, as it turns out not everyone in Washington D.C. is like that.

In an editorial written by Jim Jones last week I found this to be quite interesting and my reason for optimism this week: *Congressman Mike Simpson has once again distinguished himself as the member of Idaho's congressional delegation who can think for himself. Simpson reportedly told the Boise Metro Chamber of Commerce last week that undocumented immigrants in the U.S. should be given permanent Green Card status. That would allow them to live and work in the country without fear of being uprooted and deported, so long as they do not commit a deportable offense. Simpson observed what should be fairly obvious--that deporting the undocumented population "would be devastating for our economy." Recent estimates put that population at around 11 million people. Green Card status would allow undocumented workers to continue working without having to worry about being rounded up and tossed out of the country. A large number of these folks perform necessary work that American citizens simply won't do. Idaho's multi-billion-dollar dairy industry would not be able to sustain itself without immigrant labor. About 7,000 of the 8,300 workers on Idaho dairies are immigrants and around 5,000 of them are undocumented. Thousands of other agricultural-related jobs in our state are being performed by immigrants who don't have valid papers.*

I am most excited about my conversation scheduled with Representative Simpson this Thursday morning, unfortunately the Vice-President's TOY reception was placed right on top of it after I had scheduled the appointment. I will be spending my time with Mr. Simpson because so many of my students are children of immigrants, and many lack documentation and live every day in peril of being deported. I would say almost to a student that these kids are some of the most motivated and hardworking kids in my classes. They know and appreciate that education is the key to their future and they make the most of every day they are given. The parents of

these students contribute significantly to our economy and as Mayor I am proud to have them as part of the fabric that makes up our community.

Again, I am looking forward to my conversations with Representative Simpson, Senator Risch and Senator Crapo this Thursday. It is the key to our democracy that our voice, concerns and needs be recognized by those elected to represent us. It is also critical that the voices and needs of the voiceless are also heard. I, like Representative Simpson, believe that the well-being of this State and our community depends largely on immigrants to this country, whether they are documented or not.

Where did so many things that were once right and great about America, that once allowed us to be “that shining beacon on a hill,” go so wrong that a President won’t even acknowledge those entrusted with educating the future generations of this country and denigrates almost daily the words cast on the Statue of Liberty, written into the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution?

You and I may not always or ever agree but I ask you to make the most of your time here on earth, be the best part of your today and tomorrow; be what has always been right about this country, be what has always made America great!

Until next week... (Dan Hammond will write next week’s column. Welcome home Dan!)