

Paula Noonan's column in Colorado Politics:

Consider all that Prop 119 WON'T help

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What a surprise to see former Denver Mayor Federico Pena's mug on a mailer in support of Proposition 119. He joins other former elected men in Colorado in support of this proposition, including former Governors Bill Owens, Bill Ritter, and Roy Romer, and former State Senator Mike Johnston.

Proposition 119 purports to care about low income, underprivileged children. It will grow the sin tax on marijuana to 20 percent over several years and will chip in about \$150 million/year for tutoring and other resources to private sector, non public enterprises. Twenty million dollars of the \$150 million will come from the State Land Trust, money that's supposed to go to publicly funded education.

These men have banded with the guy at Colorado Succeeds, Scott LaBand, who used to be Mike Johnston's chief legislative honcho. He's a former investment entrepreneur. Colorado Succeeds channels the funds for the 'Support Proposition 119' effort.

Pena's post government career took him to Vestar Capital, a firm with four, wealthy male founding partners including Jim Kelly, a director-at-large of the governing board for Gary Community Ventures, with Mike Johnston as current CEO and President. Gary Community Ventures, known now as just 'Gary,' has Tom Gougeon, former real estate developer, also on its board. He's currently President of the Gates Family Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Gates Rubber family.

Mike Johnston, along with Scott LaBand, is author as state senator of SB10-191, the legislation that cemented a useless but harmful teacher accountability system into state statute. It's been gradually dismantled because it doesn't work. The legislation connected teacher evaluations, state testing, and teacher pay into a disastrous trifecta of wasted time and money.

'Gary' has pitched \$1.45 million of \$1.8 million to get Proposition 119 passed. That in itself is bad. It shows the power of rich 'philanthropists' to dominate public policy in this state. Sam Gary made his money in oil. Jim Kelly makes his money investing in companies he hopes will make money for his investors. Tom Gougeon made a lot of his money with the Belmont redevelopment in Lakewood.

What these rich guys have in common is making lots of money off the public and private sector, and now getting us, the citizens of Colorado, to fund what they should be paying for through income tax policy to support public education. Are we suckers or what?

There's a reason to note the almost universally wealthy maleness of these leaders of Proposition 119. The target of this \$150 million tossed to the private sector is supposedly poor kids, many of whom are Black and Hispanic. These rich guys believe that public schools, mostly served by women teachers, have failed these kids. Their solution: capitalism and the brilliant wonder of the markets.

Let's step back and ask ourselves a fundamental question: when has capitalism and the brilliant wonder of markets done anything for poor people? And when was the last time that capitalists went all out to support public programs to help women's incomes?

This is how the recurring, annual \$150 million in marijuana sin taxes will NOT be spent. It won't be allocated to rural school districts that need about \$35 million/year to offer new teachers a \$40,000/year salary.

The money won't be used to provide more special education and other services for our woefully underfunded special ed programs. The money won't be used for anti-COVID physical improvements to schools. It won't be used to offset the transportation problems districts have in recruiting drivers to get kids to school, yet alone to go on field trips.

The money won't be used to offset the now \$10 billion in underfunding schools have endured since the state essentially dumped Amendment 23 in the constitution. And this money will be off the table for supporting public education in the future.

Instead, \$150 million/year will go to creating a new bureaucracy overseeing which companies will be certified to get the millions and to make sure the money goes to those companies rather than into the pockets of the poor parents of the poor children who, the proposition implies, cannot be trusted with that money.

But we can trust the genius of these wealthy capitalists who pose that competitive tutoring markets will educate poor kids enough to move them out of poverty.

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