

January, 2007

*"It's only free
speech when
you use it."*

McKell

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The President's View

by Don McKell

Happy New Year to all ESTA members, and anyone else who reads this. As you may know, I am not one given to overly enthusiastic exuberance about too many things, but as we near the end of our first semester I am very optimistic that 2007 is going to be a good year for us. We certainly deserve one.

There are always negatives to discuss and dwell upon, but with the exception noted below I think I'll hold off writing about those until some future issue of *Panorama*. January should be a time for new beginnings and hopefulness – a time for making resolutions about goals for the coming year.

The notion of making a New Year's resolution is nothing new. In fact, it's sort of a cliché with many of us who have seen lots of former resolutions come and go over the years with something less than perfect success. No matter. As one old saying goes, "If you don't have a goal, any plan will get you there."

The concept of setting a goal and working towards achieving it suggests that there is some aspect of one's life that needs to be changed. We would normally expect that something will have been *improved* once we have accomplished our goal, and that means we first have to identify something bad in order to work to make it good.

So, what can be made better? More to the point, what do I care about *over which I can have any influence* that is in need of improvement in order to make it better? The Oakland Raiders? No way. President Bush? No. I either do not care about or cannot do anything about either of those failures. But there is something. What about health care?

We are indeed fortunate here in ESTA to have had the resolve in ourselves, the skill of our Negotiators, and the concurrence of our employer to enjoy the sort of health benefits with which we are endowed. Of the 33 school districts in Santa Clara County, there remain only a tiny handful that provide medical benefit plans that are fully-paid by the district. Ours is one of the few.

A huge percentage of our brothers and sisters in neighboring school districts pay some portion of their own earnings to round out the health insurance coverage for themselves, their spouses, and their dependents. In many cases, those portions amount to \$400 or more per month. They do that, grudgingly perhaps, but with the understanding that going underinsured in this day and age is both dangerous and foolhardy.

But across the nation, some 50% of the residents are either underinsured or have no health insurance whatever. A smaller and smaller proportion of us in the United States have health insurance of any sort through our employers. Those without employee group health plans, who can afford to, purchase their own at widely diverse levels of coverage. Those who cannot afford to pay either wait until they are very sick before seeking emergency care, or they simply get worse and die for lack of adequate attention.

The disgusting fact (to me, at least) is that the health care system in this nation has evolved into one that is based solely upon an individual's ability to pay, rather than the needs of the individual and the ability of society to provide for those needs. It's all about profits. Medicine is big business. In fact, it's colossal. But if we look around at virtually every other industrialized nation on the planet, including many with which we might not like to be compared, we find they do it better. This is the sort of reality that should have driven Congress to act on our behalf years ago. Presumably they have had more pressing things on their collective mind, like Nero did. Or Jack Abramoff.

In 2004, *per capita* spending on health care in the United States was \$6,102. In Germany (mind you this was several years after the fall of the Berlin wall and the absorption of the bankrupt DDR) it was \$3,159. In the U.K., it was \$2,546 and in Japan it was \$2,249. Switzerland, Canada, France and the Scandinavian countries are in there, too, all spending significantly less per capita on health care than the U.S.

But that's not all. Not only was (and is) the per capita health care spending in the U.S. about double what it is in other first-world countries, but a huge percentage of our people – about 1 in 6 – have no access to affordable health care at all other than in emergency rooms. In many, many other countries, universal health care is a right. Everyone gets it.

And the bizarre fact is, it's *better* care, too. The U.S. population, with all our benefits and assets, still suffers from a shorter life expectancy, a higher infant and pregnant woman mortality rate, and far greater adverse outcomes to routine hospitalizations than do

people in at least 36 other countries. It's enough to make you sick. But don't you dare, if you are among the one out of every six uninsured Americans.

Far from putting us in the vanguard for quality health care, the profit-based health industry is hurtling out of control towards self destruction. Annual health care costs are rising at a rate of 11%, and have steadily been for years, while income levels for ordinary people are rising at around a 3% rate. It isn't rocket science to see where those two trends are leading us. Will our students, or your children, have access to health care?

In 2004, a chest x-ray (two views, basic) at Doctors Medical Center in Modesto cost \$1,500. That same service at UC Davis, or Cedars Sinai or West Hills in Los Angeles would have cost around \$480, and the same service at Scripps Memorial in San Diego or San Francisco General cost less than \$200. What's wrong with this picture? Greed.

The insurance companies are obviously in collusion with medical providers to tolerate such extravagant diversity in pricing for the same services. Obviously, the insurance companies are also an enormous part of the problem. Medical insurance company profits increased 234% from 2000 to 2004. You might want to read that again. The CEOs of Health Net, United Health Group, Wellpoint (Blue Cross) and Cigna, to name just a few, all raked in obscene levels of compensation in 2005, from a low of \$8.5m up to \$12.4m.

Most of the dollars spent on health care in California and the rest of the country flow through insurance companies. That is a fact. But only 70% of the health care dollars that flow into insurance companies are spent on health care. That is also a fact. The other 30% – about \$20 billion annually in California – is profit.

So, that's a thumbnail summary of what's bad. Now for the good part. There is hope. We ordinary people *can* do something about this. In fact: we must, and we will. Fixing this broken system is inevitable, because not to do something about it will very quickly bring about a situation that is too terrible to tolerate.

It will take me at least one more *Panorama* to complete this series, but I hope I have planted a seed or awakened a resolve in some ESTA members that will grow root and sustain itself until next month. Until then, if any of what I have written resonates with you, do us all a favor. Block out the day of Sunday, August 20, 2007 on your calendar. Something absolutely *great* is going to happen, and you can be a part of it.

Organizing Committee Report

by Marisa Vera

Open enrollment ends January 29, 2007, so now is the time to send in your disability and/or life insurance forms. Contact your Building President for a form if you still need one. A self-addressed stamped envelope should be included with the form. Send it in as soon as possible.

By the way, the cost of such coverage is deducted each month from you salary. For additional questions contact me at 347-7198 (77198 from a district phone). I am usually at my desk by noon. Feel free to leave a message or email me at veram@esuhsd.org or ESTAVP@aol.com

My next visits will begin in February since finals are coming up and it is a busy time for all of us.

I would like to remind my colleagues at Piedmont Hills, Santa Teresa, Overfelt, and Yerba Buena that each site still needs an assembly representative to serve from January to December of 2007. Please contact your Building President if you are interested. If only one member is interested, there will be no need for another election.

New Teacher check-in has been scheduled for Wednesday February 7th at 4:00 pm at the Mt. Hamilton office. Please plan on attending if you are new to East Side and have questions or concerns to share. ESTA will provide food and drinks, so come on in and celebrate that you survived the first semester. Don McKell and I will be there, as well as other ESTA leaders.

Also in February, I would like to have a meeting with all people interested in join the Organizing Committee. I need at least two people per school site to join. We would probably meet for an hour and a half every three months or so. Each committee member would be the person to help build improve communication between each of the sites. A few sites already have one person who has told me they will join my team. Please email me and let me know if you are interested.

ESTA SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

Santa Teresa

It is time for the annual ESTA Scholarship. If you are an ESTA member, and you have a child who is a senior in high school or a first-year college student, then your son or daughter is eligible for this scholarship. The awards

are based upon a combination of community service, GPA and need. The scholarship award is based upon the strength of the application and monies available ranges from \$500 to \$2000. If you are interested, please do not hesitate to contact Neil Wilson at Santa Teresa High School via e-mail at wilsonn@esuhsd.org or at 347-6200. You may also pick up an application at the Mt. Hamilton Union office by calling 272-2601. The deadline for all applications is March 2, 2007.

--Neil Wilson

JOB SHARE OPPORTUNITY

Oak Grove

Dear Colleagues,

I'm looking for a math teacher interested in sharing a 2007-08 teaching assignment either at my school (OGHS) or your school. This shared position would be full time for one semester. I would like to teach the first semester and hope to find someone to teach the second semester. This would be a great opportunity for someone who is already part-time or is planning to do the Willy Brown provision. If you are interested and would like more information please e-mail me or call me at (408) 268-7526.

--Tillie Gardella,
Math Dept OGHS

PANORAMA MARTIN BRANDT, IHS EDITOR

Panorama is a monthly publication of the East Side Teachers' Association, 888 S. Capitol Ave. San Jose, CA.

Panorama is a forum for ESTA members, and welcomes all member contributions. Submissions must include author's name, position, and school site. Those with fewer than 250 words will be printed in the "Letters" section. All submissions may be edited for length or clarity.

Letters, articles, columns, queries, or classified ads (for ESTA members only) should be emailed as **Microsoft Word Attachments** to brandtm@esuhsd.org. Deadline for February submissions is **Friday, February 9, 2007**.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in *Panorama* are those of individual members and may not represent the official views of the East Side Teachers Association. *Panorama* will not print ad hominem attacks, personal insults, or racially provocative imagery.

YOUR CONTRACT

*Although prepared for martyrdom,
I preferred that it be postponed.*
--Winston Churchill

In a similar vein, it is time that we start postponing the martyrdom of our newer teachers. Nobody would question that our profession poses significant challenges and hurdles—so many of which occur in the first few years of teaching. The next decade will witness unprecedented demand for new teachers while an equally unprecedented generational bulge (I'm referring to age, not to physique) approaches retirement.

Current levels of new teacher attrition—whereby we invariably lose good new teachers—range from 35-50%. While we needn't make the pathway to a career in education easy, lowering the bar of teacher quality, we needn't make it harder than it should be; new teacher induction should be a process of professional development—not hazing. Fortunately, our contract contains two provisions that can serve to assist the newer teacher: Articles 8.5 and 14.6.

Article 8.5 states “the District will make every effort to balance teacher schedules to that equal opportunity is afforded all bargaining unit members who request to teach all levels of courses, regardless of seniority.” And indeed, all teachers should be able to teach all levels of courses—especially in their early career.

What often happens to new instructors? New English teachers often teach three preps, the majority of them remedial classes with students who are taking English 1 or English 2 for the second time; Math teachers are teaching sheltered Math and Math 1 to repeaters—with the challenge often revolving around motivating students who are masters of manipulating inexperienced teachers and evading work. Added to that, many new teachers are facing this challenge without their own classroom. Couple resistance to learning with the plight of living like a vagrant, and the first two years of life in education can become a living hell—with constant scenery changes.

New teachers deserve exposure to upper level courses and students so that they can face the challenge of curriculum without all the burdens of classroom management that can often challenge any teacher's self-confidence. We all hear the clichés about how new teachers should avoid the faculty room, where the conversations focus on complaints and griping. But without courses where new teachers can actually deal

with coursework—there is little else they can talk about, and their teaching experience ends up like an episode of Jerry Springer rather than *Stand and Deliver*.

We all deserve a better storyline. If it looks like you will draw the schedule from hell, don't shrug like the fan of a losing team and “hope for next year.” Request some rationale if you are teaching nothing but Comp and Lit and Corrective reading for the second consecutive year. If you receive an inadequate response? Contact your local grievance representative and press the issue.

Additionally, newer teachers should be aware that Article 14.6 also provides for reasonable limits to the number of classes they will teach: “Bargaining unit members who are assigned to more than two (2) preparations for the ensuing year shall be notified by the Principal or designee(s) as to the reason for said assignment prior to making the assignment. For the purposes of this section, *bilingual and sheltered courses constitute separate preparations*.” (Emphasis added—ed.) When assigned multiple preps, new as well as veteran teachers should take advantage of these guidelines. Any course that requires significantly supplemented materials or a dramatically distinct pace of instruction should be deemed a separate prep—even though the subject area may be the same.

If you've drawn a schedule with three preps, you deserve a reasoned answer as to why. Administrators fall into habits of established-practice as much as teachers and students do. Break them of the habit, and ensure your school's master schedule has a purpose and follows a plan.

New teachers should gain skill and aptitude with lower level and remedial courses, but they shouldn't be eaten alive. As Mick Jagger tells us, “You can't always get what we want. But if you try sometimes, you just might find you get what you need.”

We owe it to ourselves as professionals to ensure our on-site administrators build out class assignments with as much reason and vision as possible. Class section requests by our administrators will arrive very soon for the 2007-2008 school year. New teachers should be unafraid to lay claim to the courses they want, the courses that will challenge their minds as well as their patience. ETA members owe it to themselves to ensure that nurturing and cultivating our newer teachers is a lynchpin to our success as an organization; our contract (as exhibited here) serves as the proof.

Paul Landshof
Piedmont Hills
Grievance co-chair

December 14th Board Meeting

Disclaimer: The sentiments contained herein are those of this intrepid reporter only and are not politically or diplomatically neutral.

Now, the board meeting went until midnight.

Word on the street prior to the exhausting participation was that Eddie Garcia had already been given the job and Barbara Boone would come in second. If the board had any integrity, they would have selected a woman as requested by most members of the citizen's committee that gave so many nights to this process. In Barbara Boone they had a chance in the final moments to select a woman and educator—who would also be a nod the Black community that has been working so hard to change outcomes for their kids—for some balance of viewpoint and skills .

Congratulations to Mrs. Boone, who was a class act through the whole exercise.

Prior to the selection of the final two, all four candidates were interviewed. Darcie Green is a wonderful young JL graduate who hit a true homerun in interview. She clearly knows more about education and boards and the needs of our students than any of her inquisitors. She is a powerful young woman, and if this district is very lucky, she will run in two years. She would have been the only non-Evergreen or Berryessa board member.

Sharon Godbolt is an attorney with military, union and poverty law background who is on the planning commission. She, too, could have brought an interesting dynamic to this board. They would have had a hard time pulling off a bogus censure for political reasons on her.

There was a first rating poll of the board and—surprise, surprise!—it was Garcia and Boone. Who could have seen THAT coming? Then the lengthy reasonings, mullings, and musings-out-loud commenced:

In his plea for balance and a broader constituency, Frank Biehl, trying to be a voice of reason, stated that there is a difference in approaches and perceptions between men and women. Biehl was told by Shirakawa to stop grandstanding. Frank had asked each candidate about meetings with board members prior to that night, in an attempt to sunshine the process. But corporate calls and lobbying had a greater impact on the decision than reason and fairness ever could. Lan and George appeared to have decided on Eddie Garcia before the

first vote. Manuel referred to the power of the calls and comments from folks outside the room. Lan, in a move that could have added a small chance for the female candidates, suggested a coin toss after the deadlock

2:2. George said no and continued the sham “process.” Manuel could have made it 2:2, but decided to vote for his pal, thus giving the position to Eddie Garcia.

**Wendy Stegeman
Andrew Hill H.S.**

EDDIE MAY BE A GOOD CANDIDATE, BUT THIS SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN HIS TIME.

George told Mrs. Boone that she should focus on her church level activities, that this board was about “to take it to the next level.” Being a lady, she didn’t smack him. He and Manuel suggested that she might be too wrapped up in education to see the big picture. They referred to her use of educationese and alphabet soup. Her expertise might have added some knowledge and experience to board decision making. Manuel, in his musings, rationalized the idea that he could vote for a man because the voters had created a five-man board when they voted Martinez-Roach out in November, so obviously they didn’t see any critical value to having a woman on the board. It was a breathtaking leap of logic to justify a questionable act.

Since it had all been decided prior to any of the interviews, it was rude to put the community and employees through all of those exhausting evenings. Every one of the four finalists brought expertise in a particular area, but gender SHOULD have played a part. Of the last two finalists, Barbara Boone was the only one with a clue about what is needed in schools—including the difference between restricted and general funds. No woman will have a voice in this district for the next two years, except with Frank Biehl, and sometimes with Manuel if he can withstand the pressure from George. Lan should be ashamed—he seems to have forgotten who helped him get where he is, the promises he made, and that the good of the district children should be put above that of the board members’ aspirations.

Welcome to the board, Mr. Garcia. Please prove me wrong. By the way, if you ever want to learn anything about education, there are about 1,700 experts out here to tap—even though three members of the board said that educators and education don’t mean jack where they sit. But 25,000 kids know the truth. They, too, have only Frank as a voice on the board.

I hate being so disappointed.

Review of Frank McCourt's memoir***Teacher Man***

Any high school teacher who can read *Teacher Man* without laughing out loud (or at least smiling broadly) probably needs to retire. The book does much more, but principally it recounts the nearly thirty years Frank McCourt spent teaching in New York City high schools, before he became famous as the author of *Angela's Ashes* and *'Tis*. There's the story of the day he decided to turn his students' ability to forge excuse notes to account, assigning them the composition "An Excuse Note from Adam (or Eve) to God." There's the day he gets his creative writing students to recite, chant, sing (with musical accompaniment!) recipes from the cuisines of the world. But his sense of humor also cost him. Once, when an unfriendly principal asked him if he wanted his soon-to-be-born baby to be a boy or girl, he said, it was all the same to him..

"Well,' he said, 'as long as it's not a neuter.'

'Well, if it is, I'll train it to grow up and be a principal.'"

His "lay-off" notice soon followed.

But *Teacher Man* is more than just a fun story, especially in our changing climate of educational expectations, bureaucratic/political blindness and measurability-monomania. If I taught this book (not a horrible idea, by the way), I would begin, like I so often do, by asking the students to assume that the "meaning" begins, not on the first page, but with the title. The "hidden, deeper messages" connect to the name. Why "Teacher Man"?

The short answer is that McCourt refuses to simply fill the role of "teacher" in front of his captive audience of adolescents. He talks about the "mask" he can and sometimes must put on, when the curricular demands meet the needs of the students, and he becomes essentially a purveyor, a conduit, of "skills" or "grammar." But he never lets us forget that that role is always surrounded by a sea of emotions, of needs, and of personal and cultural history-- all the stuff that makes us human.

McCourt doesn't pretend, either, that honesty makes teaching *easier*: "Broadway audiences meet actors halfway with politeness and applause....They cluster at stage doors and ask for autographs. Public high school teachers perform five times a day. Their audiences disappear when bells ring and they're asked for autographs only on yearbooks at graduation." But honesty is still the best way to make genuine contact:

Jerry Dyer
Silver Creek

"At Stuyvesant (High School) I decided to admit it when I didn't have the answers. I just don't know, friends.... I'm hazy on Transcendentalism...I used to know the meaning of condign but now it escapes me. I'm strong on usufruct. I'm sorry, I couldn't finish *The Faerie Queen*. I'll try again someday after I sort out the Metaphysicals." What's the point? By admitting to ignorance, he exchanges the mask of "expert" or "source of knowledge" for the role of the "still-learning" human being: "I won't use ignorance as an excuse. I won't take refuge behind the gaps in my education. I will lay out a program of self-improvement to make me a better teacher..."

Nor does McCourt ever let us forget that the tide of the human sea flows both ways, necessarily. So his students get to hear his stories, of Ireland, of working on the docks of New York, of his own childhood and education. ("You have to be careful what you fill your head with," he once tells a parent on back-to-school night: "My own head was so packed with stuff from Ireland and the Vatican I could hardly think for myself.")

And into that open space where he is a "man" (not merely a teacher), they can venture their tales. Like the girl who shares her account of the night her father died, when her family gathered to watch Neil Armstrong take the first human step on the moon. She shuttled from the living room to the bedroom (where he lay dying) and was the one confronted with the task of telling people that Armstrong's first steps on the moon corresponded with her father's final breath on earth. As McCourt summarizes: "The kids are opening up in their writing and classroom discussions and I'm getting a written tour of American family life from East Side townhouses to Chinatown tenements. It's a pageant of the settled and the new and everywhere there are dragons and demons."

It is this humanity that resonates throughout *Teacher Man*. The individual stories bring the book to life, much as they brought life to his teaching. (Not the numbers: he knows, for example, that he taught 12,000 students, conducted more than 33,000 classes.) And this book can be a gentle reminder, to us, of what we are really about: not just meeting standards, but growing human beings, and growing *as* human beings. Maybe, sometimes, we need to recollect, as McCourt says, "that teachers and kids have to stick together in the face of parents, supervisors and the world in general."

Amen.

ESTA Classifieds

MindsInSight Online Classroom Tools - MindsInSite is a hosted Moodle solution for teachers and trainers of any kind. Allowing us to host your remote learning solution allows you to spend your time developing content rather than managing software and hardware. Cut your time spent on paperwork in half. 10% discount for all ESUHSD teachers. Take a look at our services at: <http://www.mindsinsight.com> and/or contact Bruce Selzler @ 347-4936

VACATION RENTAL: Cozumel houses available by the week. One and a half blocks from ocean. Easy walking distance to shopping & ferry to mainland. Three rental units: 3 bedroom, 2 bath \$950; 2 bedroom, 1 bath \$650; & 2 bedroom, 2 bath \$680. All 3 units combined for \$2,052. Ten percent discount for teachers. Summer rates are lower. All have kitchen, A/C, DSL internet, cable, safes, and phone and access to pool, rinse tank for scuba, courtyard, and sundeck on roof. Contact Mike at 251-1584 or cloughmf@msn.com.

Wedding/Event DJ. \$120.00 per hour. We are a husband/wife team that will work very hard to make your special day perfect. Contact Anthony Kudsi (IHS) at (408) 858-4555 for more info or to make an appointment.

Materials for Spanish For Spanish Speakers classes : Books, posters, etc. Sistilio Testa (WCO, OG, ret.) 295-6327.

Joe Sousa, handy service: Remodeling, repair, plumbing, electrical, flooring and tile, drywall. Free estimates. Excellent references. License number 316835. Tel. (408) 234-7428. (Marie Anderson, AH).

LOS GATOS LATTICE: fences, decks, gates, pergolas, arbors, patio covers, retaining walls, automated gates, outdoor projects. Also, general construction/remodelling as well: crown molding, baseboards, doors, windows, drywall, finish work, etc. Call DAVE FREDERICKS @ 347-3966 or contact at big57wave@yahoo.com. References from colleagues at all ESUHSD schools.

CGT Travel, Contact Marian Dotson, at 831-338-1959 cgtravelpals@yahoo.com CGC Travel cst 2027232-40

Mission Style. CUSTOM MADE CHERRY Entertainment center/cabinet & chest of drawers/cabinet.

ENTERTAINMENT CENTER is 7 ft. tall, 64 inches long, 22 inches deep. It has 5 doors, 2 drawers, & opening with shelves 28 inches wide by 43 inches tall. CHEST OF DRAWERS is 9 ft. long, 67 inches tall, 24 inches deep, has 16 drawers and 2 doors. They are a matching set and were made for a large bedroom. Contact Dave Fredericks: email big57wave@yahoo.com or PHHS woodshop#73966.

Wedding Officiant: Special offer for ESTA members. Local weddings performed for \$200. Contact griffinje@esuhd.org for info and details.

Intero Real Estate Services Selling or buying a house is very personal.....but you can get two great realtors by calling Sam Alvarado (772-7661) or Sheryl Ruth (348-5449). They are Intero people (a great firm) and through their WREATHS Program are donating \$1000 to your school program, department or team for ANY name that results in a sale. It is a no-brainer and seamless!

For Sale: Wurlitzer Organ. Full pedals, 2 keyboards, beautiful walnut finish. Sounds great. \$250.00 or best offer. Contact Nick Shehadi (408) 265-0351.

Clean comfortable quiet home for rent in Blossom Valley: 3 Bedrooms & 2 Baths \$2100.00. New carpet, Jacuzzi tub in newly remodeled master bath, large master suite, wood burning fire place, updated appliances, central heat and air, new windows, newly insulated attic, two car garage with storage, washer/drier hook up (gas or electric), 1450 square feet of living space, 2000 square feet of yard newly seeded, lawn mower & trimmer provided, covered patio, privacy fence in back, security system (though not needed), community pool, great open floor plan access to Hwy 85, 87 and 101. Available immediately. Sorry no section 8 please. \$2100.00 deposit required, cats are welcome. Call Caryl Selk at 408-973-9325 for more information. Virginia Yenter Yanowsky, (EVHS).

1 bedroom granny unit. \$800.00 a month includes all utilities except propane and phone. It is located in the East Foothills—no dogs please! If interested call Kathy and Rich Harris 408-274-8271.

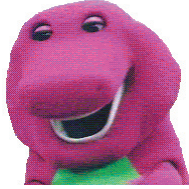
*Deadline for submissions to the February
edition of Panorama:
Friday, February 9, 2007*

The Backside

Not to be mistaken for Truth

Barney offers to mediate Trump-O'Donnell crisis

Barney the purple dinosaur, that loveable hero to a generation of preschoolers, has offered to step in and mediate the bitter conflict between real estate speculator Donald Trump and comedian Rosie O'Donnell—a conflict which has held in thrall a nation with nothing better to think about.



“Small children need to learn how to get together and cooperate to solve problems,” said a grinning Barney at a news conference from Public Broadcasting System headquarters. “I think Donald and Rosie just need to be reminded. Uh-huh-

huh-huh-huh!”

Friends of the irrepressibly jovial reptile are confident that this is a situation which is right up his alley.

“One time I was mad because I couldn't tie my shoe,” said *Barney and Friends* co-star Baby-Bop, a close personal friend and also a dinosaur. “Barney told me, ‘Baby-Bop, you can do anything you can put your mind to.’ Then he gave me a hug!”

Added Baby-Bop: “I have the maturity of a three-year-old and a brain the size of a peanut. Barney should be able to deal with these two just fine!”

Barney's strategy is simple:

“Small children love happy songs,” said Barney. “The first thing I would get them to do is to sing ‘If You're Happy and You Know It.’ I am certain that hugs would soon follow. Uh-huh-huh-huh-huh!”

O'Donnell—who ignited the controversy by calling into question Trump's well-documented beneficence, aesthetic sense, and financial acumen—has agreed to meet with Barney.

A spokesman for Trump said that the noted philanthropist could not respond until he had closed the deal on that morning's comb-over.

God to Robertson: girls will make up

Noted soothsayer Pat Robertson has reported that after his latest discussion with the Almighty, he can reasonably predict that local high school sophomores Lotta Noyes and Velveeta Loquatia will put an end to their longstanding feud and resume being “Best friends 4-evah.”

“It was just a big misunderstanding,” declared Robertson on yesterday's edition of *The 700 Club*. “God has made clear that whatever it was that had come between them will no longer remain an issue in 2007.”

Robertson added that God had let him in on many other things about “such trifles as terrorism, disease, nuclear attacks and the stock market, but we all know how important this friendship is.”

Loquatia and Noyes have been fighting since 2004, when Noyes broke Loquatia's iPod.

Teachers praised for teaching standards

Strike up the band. The American Society of Gershwin Fanatics has published a report praising the teaching of standards in America's public schools, hailing the development as “the most positive step American schools have taken in decades.”

Titled “Changing My Tune,” the report singles out for praise “The wisdom of our pedagogical leaders who have finally realized that what our students need most is a good strong dose of standards. Gershwin—George and Ira—Irving Berlin, Leonard Cohen, Cole Porter. ‘Swonderful to see.’”

“How long has this been going on?” asked ASGF president Ivana Key. “We've been saying this for decades, but they all laughed. Instead the country moved from Folk to Blues to Soul to Rock ‘n’ Roll to Disco to Funk to Rap.”

“What happened while people kept switching their preferences like so many paper napkins? The schools went to hell. But not for me. We spoke out, even when nobody was listening. After all, our love is here to stay. And now that everyone realizes that what our children need most is standards, aren't you kinda glad we did? Who's got the last laugh now?”

When told that teaching standards did not involve the priceless cultural heritage of American music but in fact a mostly intellectually bankrupt list of lower-level thinking skills designed and enforced in such a way as to rob the classroom of any vestige of joy, Key's face fell visibly.

“Let's call the whole thing off,” she sighed.