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Government 1

21 October 2014

Time for A Change in Teacher Salary

Teaching has long been thought of as one of the most sacred and respected professions, outside of the United States, that is. Although such an important aspect of our society, the teachers within the United States are underpaid and often overworked. However, teachers are given a very important task; educating the nation’s youth and one can almost predict our countries future based on the way in which our teachers are educating the youth. With such low salaries, many of the most qualified individuals shy away from teaching. Not to mention, many professional educators are often not performing at their highest standards, due to teacher tenure. By raising teacher salary, this will be beneficial to our teachers, will raise the quality of teaching, and will do away with tenure in the process.

By passing this bill, teacher salaries will be raised by $5,600 per teacher, or about 10%, as the national average for teachers is $56,000 (High School Teachers). Many teachers are even forced to work more than one job, simply to make ends meet. Wade Brosz, a successful Florida middle school teacher, is forced to work as a personal trainer, so that he can make ends meet for him and his wife, also a teacher (Armario). Many teachers are being forced to look for other options, simply because of such low pay in a country with a relatively high cost of living. In Texas, teacher moonlighting has nearly doubled in the last thirty years, as it grew from 22% in 1980, to 41% in 2010 (Armario). How are teachers expected to perform at their highest quality, when they have to worry about putting food on the table? Or paying for their house? We can’t expect to improve education, if our teachers are too tired from working two jobs to be focused within the classroom. Even when you compare American teacher salaries to the world, we’re far below average. Our teachers, after even 15 years of teaching, still make below the average wage per gross domestic product per capita, at 96%, whereas the worldwide average, evaluated over fifty countries, is about 115%, with the highest numbers, Korean teachers, making about 220% of GDP (Rampell).Not only will teachers lead better lives as a result of this bill, but the quality of teaching will greatly increase as well.

American testing scores have long been on the lower side of average, as compared to the world. Out of 34 OECD countries, or Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, America ranks 26th in math, 21st in science, and 17th in reading (Ryan). Scores as dismal as this obviously shows that teachers are often not doing their job to the best of their abilities, or are just simply not doing very well. You can see the relationship between teacher salary and scores here very clearly, as Finland, which is considered the highest echelon of education, have some of the highest paid teachers, as well as some of the best test scores (Ryan). This could also be examined as a fault of teacher salaries. The top three countries in the world, as compared to the US by test scores, all have teachers who are typically in the top third of their universities or colleges graduating class, whereas only 23% of high achievers pursue a career in teaching, mainly because of the problems making ends meet (Jennings). This clearly shows, America loses many of the brightest and best achieving students to other professions simply because of the problems securing a stable and livable salary by teaching. But, if we were to raise the salary just a little, we would be on the right track to improving the American education system, and the future. It’s been shown that if we replace the least effective teachers, the lowest 5-7%, based on test scores, we could increase the GDP of the country approx. 1%, or over a lifetime, about $112 trillion (Hanushek). Staggering figures such as this indicate that by passing this bill and raising teacher salary will well be worth it, especially over time. Another beneficial aspect of the bill will be the disestablishment of teacher tenure.

Tenure can be defined as the permanent post awarded to a teacher or professor, often coming with increased job security (Barnard). Tenure, for most teachers within the United States, requires about four years, and there is no benchmark evaluation standard, leading to different standards that could be varying by schools (Guerrero). This confusing and unnecessary principle is used by many schools to reward teachers after a few years, with a lifetime job. As teachers attempt to gain this near failsafe, they are essentially forced into being less attentive educators, focusing less and less on the student and their learning, and more on themselves and as a result of this, the students suffer. As Michael Petrilli, the executive vice president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, writes for the New York Times, “…any benefit that tenure provides to teachers is far outweighed by its costs to children and society by keeping grossly ineffective instructors in the classroom” (Petrilli). Tenure, although commonly thought of as invented by unions, was more so a benefit to working a terribly paying job, in brutal working conditions, with an enormous amount of work, and many unions adopted this idea of having job security (Ravitch). The Teacher Salary Reform Act of 2014, although doing away with tenure, also does include a subsection that will protect teachers from unfair dismissal, an already well-established principle in the American court of law. By getting rid of tenure, teachers will be forced to maintain a high level of teaching, without having a ‘grace period,’ so to speak, after the first few years, and will ultimately help improve the American education system.

Opponents of this bill may argue that tenure is a necessity for American teachers. However, they often forget that many teachers are protected by a modern system of law. Getting rid of a teacher is no easy process, with there being a long ordeal and multiple evaluations, regardless of the status of tenure (Martens-Olzman). Because of this, having tenure for job security becomes practically irrelevant, as many teachers no longer get fired for teaching their beliefs, or in a certain manner, like John Scopes back in 1925. Many other opponents of this bill believe that by eliminating teacher tenure, we’ll be hurting the profession itself, as there would be even less people attracted into pursuing teaching (Ehrenfreund). However, this is also false. Without tenure, and with a reasonable pay raise, teachers will be held to a lot of the same standards as many other jobs, with an ever present thought that low performance and indecency will result in termination. This only will bring out the best from teachers, as they will have to be at the top of their game throughout their teaching careers.

Passing the Teacher Salary Reform Act of 2014 will be beneficial to our teachers, will raise the quality of teaching, and will do away with tenure. These are all benefits to the American education system that continuously falls behind the international standard. In order for America to continue competing on the global scale, our future needs to be in good hands. And by securing a higher salary while eliminating tenure for our teachers, we will be enhancing our chances to compete with dominating countries in the world. Teaching is the most important profession when it comes to the future of America. Lets respect and pay it like it should be.

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