

 **TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"**  
**IMPROVING HIGHER  
EDUCATION:  
IS MORE MONEY  
REALLY THE  
ONLY ANSWER?**

By Stephen L. Bakke  May 11, 2015



*Here's what provoked me:*

*An article by the Lieutenant Governor chastised the republican state legislators for trying to reject the Governor's proposal to improve higher education simply by spending and subsidizing. The money is to come from the state surplus. Well, the issue isn't quite that simple, and certainly the presentation has a lot of demagoguery in it. I thought I would try to balance that a little.*

*Here's my response:*

**Improving Higher Education: Is more money really the only answer?**

I read with interest the "Opinion Exchange" article by Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith on May 11 ("Investing in higher ed is one path to prosperity"). The message was clear: Republicans, agree to spend the state surplus on the Governor's higher education proposal or you are rejecting Minnesota's legacy of being a "Brainpower State." According to Smith, you can't share a commitment to "access and equity" unless you align yourself with the Dayton's higher education spending plans. Doing otherwise is "disinvestment" in innovation, entrepreneurship and "a better life" for Minnesotans – so sayeth Ms. Smith.

Reading this brought to mind another democrat legislator's comment when evaluating the republican analysis of education priorities: "(paraphrased) Nowhere was there a mention of allocating any of the surplus to higher education." To be fair, an equivalent complaint can be made of Smith's article: "Nowhere was there a mention of any sort of attention to efficiencies and cost control - NOWHERE."

I support a strong and vibrant education system, but more dollars and subsidies isn't an answer all by itself. Any rejoinder to my concern would give assurances that each college and university, indeed each department, is always on guard to make sure efficiencies are maximized and dollars are conserved. But lack of emphasis breeds lack of effort!

As long as the republican priorities and budgetary concerns are dismissed "out of hand" by the democrats, the democrat "spend" solution will be dismissed by the republicans.

Ideology meets ideology = gridlock – which isn't always such a bad thing.