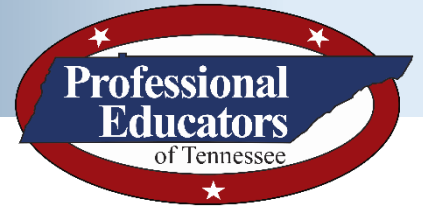


EDITORIAL

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A TENNESSEE CHRISTMAS CAROL

Last Christmas in Nashville a bombing shattered a holiday that marks peace on earth and goodwill. For those in Tennessee it was a difficult ending for an already tumultuous pandemic-filled year. This year has also proven to be challenging for many citizens in our state.

While the Dicken's character Scrooge edged his way along the crowded paths of life, he warned all who practiced human sympathy to keep their distance. Are we that different today than Scrooge? I would like to think so, but I am not so sure.

The Ghost of Christmas Past. In Christmas 1983, I was spending Christmas courtesy of the United States Marine Corps at the luxurious accommodations provided at the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Okinawa, Japan. I was a member of the Marine Air Support Squadron 2, nicknamed the "Pacific Vagabonds." We were part of the Marine Air Control Group 18, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing. After the Beirut Bombing in 1983, there was an attitude shift returning from the lost admiration the military suffered after an ill-advised war in Vietnam. We learned that respect lost can be regained.

Throughout our history, we respected the police, teachers, military, and people in authority. The respect for those in authority positions is seemingly gone today. We respected our teachers in the past. In communities across the nation educators were people to be admired. Society respected those responsible for the education of the next generation. Education was a valued and esteemed career.

The Ghost of Christmas Present. Today, a lack of respect, low pay for the amount of work required, and unrealistic expectations are commonplace. We have dealt with teachers being physically and verbally assaulted regularly. These statistics are underreported statewide and nationally. In December alone we have dealt with a few troubling cases, and the actions of school administrators were not supportive of the educator. School Resource Officers who want to do the right thing to protect the educators and other students are increasingly finding themselves being thwarted by school administrators who either fear parents or do not want the negative publicity. To be fair, some forward-thinking districts are very supportive of educators that are assaulted or attacked. Districts that are not supportive are finding teachers no longer want to work there.

Social media was once a tool to connect communities is now becoming a vehicle to bash educators. In social media, only one side of a story is presented. The other side is often prevented from responding. It is a growing issue and it is largely ignored. That is not to say there are no legitimate issues to be confronted, but social media is not a very reliable source of news like traditional media. One of the great concerns is the predatory algorithms

SUMMARY

Our wish for Tennessee this year is that legislators will adequately fund education and communities will give teachers the respect they deserve.

used by some social media platforms can drive a false narrative and manipulate negative behavior. Eric Schmidt added, "The Internet is largest experiment in anarchy that we have ever had."

The Ghost of Christmas Future. I am still that optimist that focused on hope instead of fear. I welcome the possibilities of the future. I see value in every life and believe children are gifts from God. Every child in Tennessee, and America, deserves a future centered on hope and opportunity. I wish for every child to be wanted, loved, and cared for in a home with parents who provide a nurturing environment and a state that provides quality education for every child. That every child receives an education that allows them to realize their full potential.

We must hope for a state that values and funds education. We need the message to come from the statehouse, county commissions, school boards, and every home in a community that our educators are worthy of respect and being treated with dignity. We need to look at ourselves and take responsibility for working toward that future. Nelson Mandela said that history will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children. We cannot do that without the women and men who are on the frontlines every day already doing the work. I ask that you support them in their efforts, and not be a Scrooge.

Merry Christmas to All. And God Bless Us, Everyone.

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JC Bowman is the Executive Director of Professional Educators of Tennessee, a non-partisan teacher association headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the association are properly cited. For more information on this subject or any education issue please contact Professional Educators of Tennessee. To schedule an interview please contact communications@proedtn.org or 1-800-471-4867.