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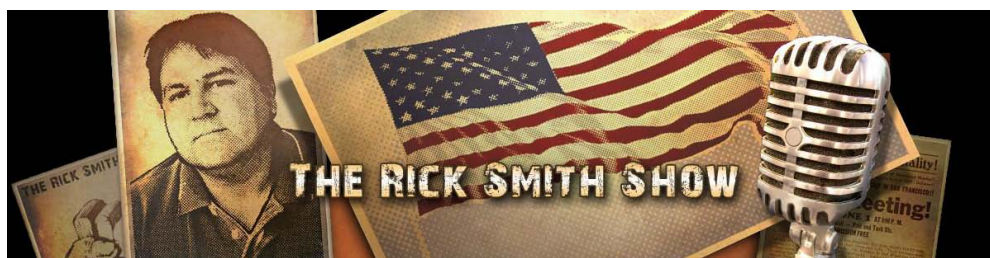
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## Rick Smith Files | Living in the '80s! Corbett's Attempt to Send Public Education Back 25 years

By Editor Zero, Raging Chicken

February 15, 2012



*Editor's Note: Just like last month's edition of the Rick Smith Files, this month Raging Chicken Press brings you two interviews from the February 7, 2012 Rick Smith Show. The theme this month is the PA Governor Corbett's proposed deep cuts in education. We wanted to bundle these two interviews into one post to underscore that the attack on public education is happening from pre-school right through higher education. Corbett is seeking to destroy public education in the state.*

Segment 1: Mike Crossey, President of Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA): "A Budget that Hurts Our Families, Hurts Our Schools, Hurts Our Kids."

Segment 2: Steve Hicks, President of Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF): "PA Leading the Race to the Bottom in Higher Education."



Click here for audio of the Feb. 7, 2012 show

Lead in music: (Andrew Bayuk, "Save the USA")

### Mike Crossey, President of Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA):

### "A Budget that Hurts Our Families, Hurts Our Schools, Hurts Our Kids."

Lead in music: (The Hit Crew, "(I've Got A) Golden Ticket")

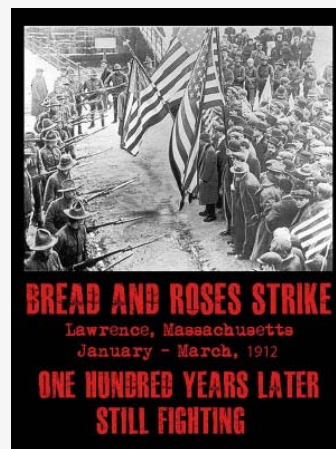
[Rick Smith]: Well, you know, if we could only get those wonderful vouchers. Oh, life would be so wonderful, or at least that's what I'm told. Every time I turn around I'm being advertised at about why we need to destroy public education, why we need vouchers, why we need more charter schools, why we need cyber charters. When you look at the numbers, when you look at the facts, they're not doing as well as the public school systems are doing! Even though their coffers seem to be full, every time I turn around I see that public school funding being cut, being cut, being cut. And today's budget talk...again, you look at the numbers. Education Voters PA, Susan Grobeski, her tweet of the day, "loss of more than \$94 million." You look at \$900 million last year, \$94 million this year...almost a billion dollars in cuts. That's why I've asked Mike Crossey, President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) to come talk to us about what he heard today, what the numbers look like, and what it means for Pennsylvania's students.

Mike, thanks for taking time for me.

[Mike Crossey]: It's great to be with you, Rick, as always. Thanks for having me on.

[Rick Smith]: I look at this and what is frustrating—again, we're talking about giving huge handouts to corporations... talking about doing away with the cap and franchise tax, but educations seems...well, we can cut that.

[Mike Crossey]: It is unfortunate. It is a totally misguided budget and, you're right, this budget doesn't do anything at all for working class Pennsylvanians. It doesn't do anything to promote jobs in the state. It doesn't do anything for transportation in the state. But, yes, they decided they would cut education once



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again—basic education, K-12 funding, and higher education.

[Rick Smith]: You know that one of the things he [Corbett] said he wanted to do, one of his major innovations...and, again, it's not an innovation, it's the same failed policy that's been going on in this country for the last 30 years...he said he wants to propose the use of block grants. And, again, the more I look at these block grants, no matter what the issue is—if it's welfare funding, if it's Medicaid funding—it always seems to never do what it's supposed to do.

[Mike Crossey]: No, absolutely not. It's a shell game. Bottom line is that you say that you're putting more money into the program, but basically what they've done is that they've eliminated several programs, combined several line items together, which makes the one number look a little bit bigger, but in the long run what they're doing is they're cutting money. They're taking money out of basic education—we're about \$94 million short this year.

[Rick Smith]: What's that going to...Well, first I should say, what's that going to mean to me as a parent, second as a taxpayer, and third, what's it mean to small communities, small school districts who can't afford to raise taxes on the local residents any more?

[Mike Crossey]: What it means as a taxpayer is that your local property taxes are probably going to go up again. Governor Corbett is more concerned about his promise not to increase state taxes, but at the same time he is forcing local districts—school districts and municipalities—to increase taxes all across the state of Pennsylvania.

What it means to you child in school is fewer programs, fewer teachers, less opportunity. There's no doubt that this is a [budget] that hurts our families, hurts our schools, hurts our kids.

[Rick Smith]: You know, I looked at his speech today and there were a bunch of things in there that just grabbed my attention. One of the things he said is that corporations are going to come to Pennsylvania because Pennsylvania embraces free markets and he said that businesses create jobs where they feel welcome. My mind is just spinning because as a small business owner and as someone who knows other small business owners, I don't think that has anything to do with it. I think an educated workforce has an awful lot to do with it, an infrastructure system that has been invested in...I think those are the more important things than some bizarre idea that free markets, we somehow believe in.

[Mike Crossey]: You're 100% right. In the studies that I've read, one of the top one or two issues that a business looks at when it decides to move into a state or not is the quality of the education, the quality of the school districts. Governor Corbett is absolutely doing the wrong thing. He's hurting our schools, he's hurting our kids. And, nothing in this budget addresses how do we deal with the school districts that are on the verge of complete failure? Chester Upland, York City, and I could probably name 20 other districts in the state of Pennsylvania that because of last year's cuts, we were really hoping that the Governor would step up to the plate and do what was right this year: fund our schools and put back the money for the neediest students, for our minority students in those schools, for the students that have English as a second language, and provide the resources that are necessary for every child to have the opportunity to be successful and he didn't do that.

[Rick Smith]: No, he didn't, but he did use some rhetoric, because he did say that every child can learn, Mike, and he says we need to instill that faith in every school in the state, every school in Pennsylvania should be our best. That's nice to say, but how do you do that when you can't pay your teachers, you can keep the lights on, you can't pay the heating bill?

[Mike Crossey]: You know what? Rhetoric is really nice in the political world, but in the real world we need resources if we are going to educate the children that sit in front of our teachers and our support professionals in the classrooms.

[Rick Smith]: What bothers me is...I looked at this story, we talked about it last night, that the Philadelphia schools are looking at closing on the weekends—in fact they're going to, they're going to be closing on the weekends and they're going to be closing at eight o'clock every night—canceling weekend programs, canceling other programs that they have as part of the community. For me, I'm looking at this and I'm going...from the right-wing agenda, this idea that we need to destroy public education and make it private, this is a step for them in the right direction. Because they're taking the schools pretty much out of the community.

[Mike Crossey]: Right, right. And the schools should be the center of every community. I mean, we should be using our schools more, we should be rallying around them, we should be using them for social events in the community.

Schools are a big, big investment in the communities and for the governor to cut their funding to the point where they can't be used by the community anymore...it's just an absolutely horrendous budget.

[Rick Smith]: I want to go back to block grants for a second, because one of the things that's frustrating to me...you brought up Chester Upland, a place where the teachers actually worked for nothing for several weeks until the funding came in. And, they may have to again before the end of the year because they don't have enough money because in their district,



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### From the Editor

## February Issue of Raging Chicken Press is Out! Happy Birthday Wisconsin Uprising

By Editor Zero, Raging Chicken

It seems like getting the February issue out took FOREVER! I don't know if that's what it felt like for all of you out...

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## Looking Ahead to 2012: What's Next for Raging Chicken Press

By Editor Zero, Raging Chicken

I've mentioned a number of times that we have some really cool plans for Raging Chicken Press in 2012. Since we will not publish...

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as I understand it—and correct me if I'm wrong, they have a for-profit charter school in that district that has to be paid first. So, the school district has money—just like the block grant money—they've got the money, but the first person who gets it is this for-profit charter school. And then, oh, and by the way, whatever is left, you and the public school can have. As I've been saying since this story broke, this is what we are going to be seeing, first in every poor school district and then into the middle-class as they continue to destroy public education.

[Mike Crossey]: You're absolutely right. Not only do the charter schools get paid first, but the charter schools are the only schools in the state that did not receive a piece of the cut in funding that hit every other school district in the state this year. Because charter schools are paid on last year's reimbursement levels. So, even though there was an \$860 million cut across the board to schools in the state, the charter school's funding this year is based upon last year's revenue, do they didn't receive a cut. They're still demanding last year's higher subsidy levels, instead of this year's piece of the cut. So, not only do they get theirs first, but they get a bigger slice than every other child in the state.

[Rick Smith]: Geez, oh man. I look at this block grant thing and the reason I brought that up is because by doing this, do you think by having these block grants now it's going to make that system that we just laid out in that one district more likely in other districts?

[Mike Crossey]: Absolutely. Absolutely. The fact that he combined all these line items together makes it look like he's increasing funding, but what he's really doing is cutting funding.

[Rick Smith]: Is there anything good in this in your mind?

[Mike Crossey]: No. There's not a good thing in this budget at all. I mean, there's no jobs program, there's no transportation funding. In addition to the second round of cuts here for regular education, for our K-12 system, the higher ed system is cut 20 and 30 percent depending on the type of college. Higher education libraries are cut, student loan programs are cut. This is an across the board cut. Human services are cut. Mental illness programs are cut. This is a budget that hits those that can least afford it the hardest.

[Rick Smith]: What do you say to the people who say we're just...you know, Mike, we're broke. I've heard this argument a number of times, even from people who I think who are fairly intelligent—"we're broke, we can't afford it, we've got to cut back on these things, on these 'luxuries'."

[Mike Crossey]: You know...I'm a school teacher. I'm not an economist. But, when my wife and I sit down and we prepare our budget, we look at, you know, how do we control our expenses? And that's reasonable. But we also look at what we need to do to bring in revenue to support our family and to do those things that help our family grow. And I think that is what the governor ought to be doing. The governor should be looking at increased revenues. Marcellus Shale. Marcellus Shale could bring in close to \$500 million every year. If we would tax the Marcellus Shale, the extraction of our own natural resources...if we would tax those as the same as all the other states taxed them, we could bring in \$500 million more.

Seventy-six percent of the corporations in the state of Pennsylvania pay zero corporate net income tax. The governor says, eh, corporate net income tax it too high. Actually, he's right on that. He's right on that because only the small mom-and-pop corporations pay it! We could lower that corporate net income tax, make everybody pay their fair share, close the Delaware loophole, and the corporate net income tax would be lower for everybody and we could have another \$400 million to support our public school system and human needs, things we need here in the state of Pennsylvania...There's plenty of revenue out there. The governor just has to decide that he's going to go after it.

[Rick Smith]: Yep, well, you know what it is? He's all bent on the pledge. Gotta keep the pledge! Mike, great talking with you. I appreciate it. I appreciate the information. Thanks so much, we'll talk to you again real soon.

Mike Crossey, President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

## Steve Hicks, President of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF): "PA Leading the Race to the Bottom in Higher Education."

Music intro: (Chicago – "Look Away")

[Rick Smith]: Yeah, well, "Look Away" – 1989 if I remember. Wow, it's been that long, that long ago. I guess that's where our governor wants to take our education funding back to. Back to the good old days, back to the...well, almost 90s, the 1890s if you will.

Again, I look at this budget and you want to talk about redistribution of wealth, you want to talk about theft from the working class...I don't know what other words to use. The numbers are just...just staggering. A total cut of the higher education budget of over \$265 million. Understand, that is money that is coming out of working people's pockets to pay college tuition. That, to me, is a crime. That's why I've asked Steve Hicks, president of APSCUF to come talk to us about what's going on. The Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties, correct?

[Steve Hicks]: Yes, well, you almost got it. The acronym gives everybody trouble. It's great that you're playing a 1989 song because that's where the funding that the governor proposed would take us back—to our 1989 level of dollars. '89 was a great year, right?

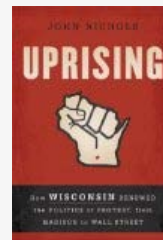
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By Editor Zero, Raging Chicken

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[Rick Smith]: Well, yeah, it was a great year in that I was much younger, but things have gone up since then. How much was college tuition back in '89?

[Steve Hicks]: About \$2,000.

[Rick Smith]: And how much is it today?

[Steve Hicks]: A little over \$6,000.

[Rick Smith]: So, we're funding it at the \$2,000 levels expecting people to pay the additional \$4,000 out of their pocket. I take it as a shift in...a massive redistribution of wealth from workers and their families upward.

[Steve Hicks]: Well that's exactly right. Every shift of state appropriation dollars is a shift to pulling money straight out of working families' pockets. In this country, we used to think of public higher education as something that was free, but that's no longer the case. You know the State System...our main audience is first generation college students and they're not in a position to be paying exorbitant tuition. One of the outcomes...if it passes as it is...is that fewer young people are going to go to four-year institutions and get college degrees in a time when everyone claims that, economically, we need to be generating more degrees.

[Rick Smith]: You look at the President's speech, you look at most of the discussion that's been going on the last 20 years at least—high school not cutting it anymore. Your high school degree isn't what it used to be, people need to have bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, or vocational training even. It looks like as a state and, to a degree, the federal level we're kind of walking away from that saying, well if you want that better life, saddle yourself with massive debt, which I think is a huge problem. I saw a statistic the other day that said student loan debt that we're creating is over \$1 trillion.

[Steve Hicks]: Yeah, student loan debt is now the second largest type of debt in the country. It's larger than credit card debt. Only mortgages are larger. There's big business there and there's probably money to be made in student debt. I know some people in higher ed financing who think that this is the next big financial bubble.

[Rick Smith]: Yeah, if that pops, it's all over because you've got all these kids graduating from college with degrees...going to these private schools, online, and the University of Phoenix's, the Waldrons and all these other places. They're graduating and they're getting these degrees and they're not finding jobs.

[Steve Hicks]: No, and you know if you've looked into this, the percentage of people who start at the places you named...there's a very low percentage that finish. So, you've invested a good number of dollars, a good number of federal dollars in grant and aid that you're able to get and you come away without a degree and nobody's satisfied then. We've not made any progress.

You know, the State System has a pretty good record of getting people through. I think we're pretty proud of our graduation rate based on the kind of students we bring in.

[Rick Smith]: So, I'm looking at this, \$265 million in over all higher ed cutting...what's the number for the State System?

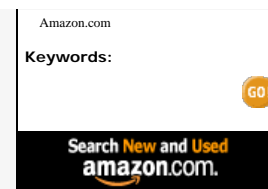
[Steve Hicks]: About \$83 million, about a third of what you're looking at. It's not just that \$83 million. If you've got the spreadsheet, the next line after the State System of Higher Education is the Higher Education Assistance Agency, which provides grants to students who can show that they need financial aid...and they cut them 5%. So, not only are you cutting the System itself, but you're cutting the aid program on the other hand. You're hitting the student's wallet in two different ways.

[Rick Smith]: What should we be doing? I mean, there's this frame that the Right has really pushed masterfully. The idea that somehow we're broke. We just don't have any more money we're broke, we can't afford education, we can't afford health care, we can't afford public services, we're just flat broke, that's it, game over. Suck it up or work at McDonald's, I guess that's the argument.

What should we have been doing differently?

[Steve Hicks]: Well, there's several things we should be doing differently. I've seen your guest list for today and they're all friends of mine from the CLEAR Coalition. We put out a report last week that showed that there are about \$2 billion per year that the state has left on the table. Between the kinds of misuses we've had as well as the kind of taxes we've let fly by. I'm sure you recognize the irony of the fact that the last thing that was voted on before the governor got up and gave his budget speech in the Senate was the Marcellus Shale bill. So, right there we applied a tax to something that we know is going to happen at the lowest rate, actually, at the lowest rate in the country. We've left a lot of revenue on the table.

Everybody I've talked to who's been involved in the shale business, and practically every lobbyist in town has a piece of shale business, will tell you that all these shale people were willing to pay higher taxes. They just wanted the bill done so they knew what to pay. They were coming to Pennsylvania, they were putting



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down wells and they were going to draw the stuff out of the ground, they just wanted to know what they had to pay so they could put it in their cost structure. We let them get away with the cheapest rate in the country...and we're sitting here and he [governor] gets up a few minutes later and says we don't have any money.

[Rick Smith]: It's mind-blowing. And, it's mind-blowing especially when you look at the fact that West Virginia has a much higher rate, actually pretty rational. I thought that's where we should have gone.

The governor, last year, said he wanted to be like Texas...it'd be a good way to go, how they deal with their natural gas. But there is something seriously wrong, as I've been saying, when we're pulling a state like West Virginia down, when we're leading the race to the bottom.

[Steve Hicks]: Right, well and you know we lead the race to the bottom in higher education too. We've been 45th for years in per capita investment in public higher education in this country. The governor...I don't really think he sits down and says I want to race to number 50, but, you know, cutting 20% out of our budget and 30% out of the state-relateds, and 6 or 7% out of the community colleges. You can't move up from 45th doing that.

[Rick Smith]: Right. Now this isn't like basic education, K-12, where the burden is going to be shifted downward to the local school taxes. This is going to directly hit the students and their families which could lead to a larger student loan bubble in my opinion, or just fewer kids going to college and more unemployed people, more folks who have less opportunity, less earning potential, which I think comes back and bites us when you're looking at long-term taxation and revenue coming in.

[Steve Hicks]: You hit a lot of great talking points there. I think one of the things to look at is how much education do we need here in the Commonwealth to compete with those around us. We produce fewer degrees than all of our neighbors on a percentage basis and the number is going down. If we want to compete in the long-term, we need an educated populace. As you said, you can't keep taking it out of the working class's pocket. Right now, our average student out of a PASSHE institution is graduating with \$23,000 of debt. There's a quick transference of almost one-to-one between the cut in the state appropriation and how much tuition is going up. It probably means that people will be borrowing more next year or they won't be going because they've reached the end of their borrowing, as much as they want to borrow. You know, most of our students are working a job part-time to make it through. And you know, those extra hundreds that this will add to their tuition bill...when you're making \$8 or \$10 an hour, it takes a lot of those hours in a part-time job to make up that money.

[Rick Smith]: It sure does. Let me ask you a last line of questioning. I've got a friend who graduated from college back in the late '60s. She went all the way through the University of Michigan, all the way through to get her law degree, walked out debt free, worked a minimum wage job, lived in her own apartment, walked out with any debt whatsoever. Student loans just weren't an option then, because the state, as I understand it and the way she explains it, the state and the federal government...they funded these things heavily. Is the rise in tuition...does that have more to do with the fact that every time we turn around the state is pulling money out of these institutions and the federal government is turning their back on higher education? Or, is it the "greedy teachers" who just want more and more and their appetite for more never ends?

[Steve Hicks]: No, I'm not going to go with the "greedy teachers" thing. Our numbers show that our pay scale has just barely kept up with inflation over the last decade. And, to go back to your point, when we started as a system in 1982, 67% of the funding came from the state, 33% came from tuition. With these numbers, we're pushing more like 75% from tuition, and 25% from the state. So, right there it tells you the redistribution. I mean, you started off by saying it's a cost shift from the state to the student. That's why the expense has gone up as much as it has. We've more and more put the burden on the student to pay for it. It's not a public good the way it used to be on the '60s and '70s. It's become—and governor Corbett is big on saying so—if you want a service, you have to pay for it. We don't care how much it might benefit the state of Pennsylvania for you to have it. The state's not going to contribute. It's an ugly trend line.

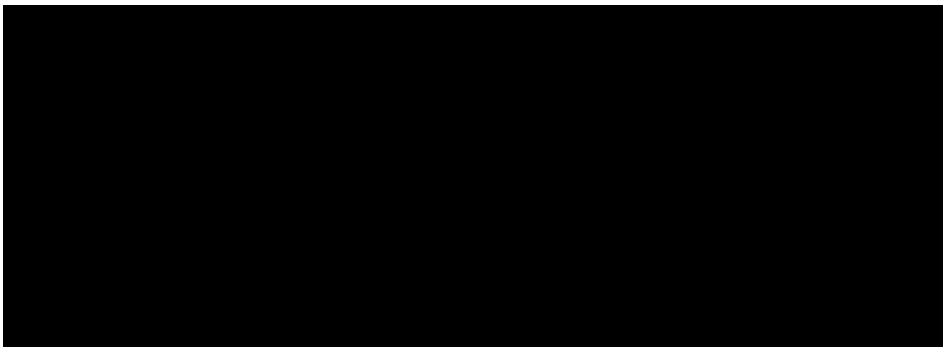
[Rick Smith]: It's the idea of the Commons that they have destroyed. The things that are ours, commonly, and the common good...a sad, sad day.

[Steve Hicks]: You know, when the governor sits around the country club with the people he hangs out with, they don't have any trouble writing college tuition checks. I don't think he is in quite as in tune with the people who are trying to go to the 14 state-owned institutions.

[Rick Smith]: Excellent point. Steve Hicks, I appreciate the time. President of APSCUF, the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties. Thanks so much. I appreciate the time.

[Steve Hicks]: Great Rick, thanks for the show.

## A Deja Vu Moment: Rick Smith on Corbett's 2011 Budget, 3/8/2011 "The Theft from Pennsylvania's Working Families Has Begun"



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