

Stop cutting education funds

As the political climate heats up and potential thoroughbreds jockey for their spot in the winner's circle, victory is sure to depend on their positions around several critical issues; among these are education and employment.

**JOSE
MEDRANO**

My Turn

Locally, too, we must all begin to study these

important issues to determine what our local herd must do to improve our chances for a positive outcome when the dust finally settles. Ladies and gentlemen, place your bets!

It is all too clear that the recent cuts in education have already had negative effects on our youth living in the border region of South Texas. Fewer dollars equals fewer services, equals fewer programs, fewer educators and support staff, and ultimately a less-educated, ill-prepared adult in our community.

Several recent newspaper articles refer to the disparity between the "have ISDs and the have-not ISDs." How are we teaching our youth to create sustainability in our communities by cutting their education dollars now? And how are we preparing to provide other related supportive resources for the tens of thousands of retiring baby boomers needing a trained and educated work force, by cutting education dollars now?

It is quite clear from recent figures that the employment opportunities for those without a basic educational credential, a high school diploma or GED, are currently limited or non-existent. It would be very interesting to find out how many of those individuals seeking employment do not have a

high school diploma or GED. More interesting, perhaps, might be the connection between those receiving unemployment or other work-related services and other public assistance, while not having yet acquired a high school diploma or GED. What is being done for them, aside from encouraging that they move more quickly from one social service trough to the next?

As a community resource center in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties providing GED, English as a second language and job skills training, START Center has seen the direct results of the academically ill-prepared youth and the underskilled job seeker from our area. As such, we are pleased to have provided a much-needed pathway for this segment of our population toward their next educational or vocational goal.

And while we applaud our Valley schools for the great work they do, and rightfully so, we do not see all of them positioning themselves for a photo finish by not acknowledging their high dropout rates. What we do see are additional codes created to allow ISDs the ability to "track" students in very creative ways.

The fault, however, does not lie entirely with our public schools, though, since they struggle to provide a good education with a state school funding system that provides them far less than they need to be successful, especially in the "have-not" ISDs from the Rio Grande Valley.

Recently, START Center and the Equal Voice Network RGV participated in Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council public hearings that could potentially create a pathway for jobs, and a

jobs training pipeline across the Valley, through a two-year construction project from HUD money that will, finally, be released for hurricane relief. Our participation, along with that of hundreds of low-income colonia families, has resulted in a decision by the LRGVDC to hold a workshop to discuss the adoption of a HUD Section 3 plan for the \$120 million scheduled for housing damages as a result of Hurricane Dolly.

We simply want the thoroughbreds on the LRGVDC board to "bite down on the bit" of this document and support jobs for the unemployed; create opportunities for the small, local contractor; and establish a jobs training pipeline for those who need it. So when the dust from the race finally settles, the commitment from our elected thoroughbreds will have created a trained work force that can be used to leverage greater opportunities for everyone, not just the owners of the equestrian centers.

Ultimately, isn't it incumbent upon the thoroughbred to win the race to keep the trainer, jockey, breeder, veterinarian and stable hand employed?

Stop cutting education dollars. Start using the local unemployed for local job opportunities. Create opportunities for those with limited skills and on public assistance. Make a commitment to serve those who need it most. Leave something for the next generation.

It doesn't take a thoroughbred to figure this out and win the race.

Jose Medrano is vice president of the START Center and education chairman of Equal Voice RGV in San Benito.