

SEP candidate Scherrer wins support at education protest in Pittsburgh

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Phyllis Scherrer won strong support from teachers, parents and students who took part in a protest against the cuts in education this past Saturday.

About 350 people gathered outside the Pittsburgh Opera to protest the Opera's decision to grant Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett an award—at a \$750-a-plate fundraiser—for his supposed support for the arts and education.

The truth is just the opposite. The Corbett administration has cut nearly \$1.2 billion from public education in the past two years and is proposing to cut another \$100 million in its upcoming budget.

Combined with cuts at the federal and local level, the effects on public education have been devastating. The two largest school districts in the state, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, are carrying out drastic cuts. In Pittsburgh, seven schools are to be closed this year and 400 teachers' jobs destroyed. These come on top of the closure of 22 schools in the past five years.

In Philadelphia, the school board is closing six schools this year and another 40 next year, and will close six schools a year for the next five years. The board has announced plans to disband the 8th largest public school system in the country, planning to auction off the schools, in blocks of 20–30, to private companies to run them for profit.

The effects of the cuts have been felt in many school districts, not just the largest. The vast majority of the 500 districts throughout the state have made devastating cuts, including teacher layoffs with a corresponding increase in class size, as well as the elimination of art, music and sports programs. Nearly a dozen districts are considering closing completely.

Eric Wilhelm, a recent college graduate, expressed his outrage at the award, "It is a travesty that they are awarding a governor who has done so much to destroy education in this state.

"Education is very important for people to have a full value of life and in themselves. It is important for people to have a full view of what is going on in the world."

Eric voted for Obama in 2008, but he said, "I am generally disappointed in the outcome of the Obama administration. I don't want to be invading another country every few years. He should be ending wars, not creating new ones.

"I like a lot of what you are saying. To me there is a lot of merit in breaking up the two-party system."

The protest was called after a blogger noticed that the Pittsburgh Opera was awarding Governor Corbett and his wife a lifetime achievement award for their support for the arts. His posting attracted the attention of thousands in the Pittsburgh area who have seen the effects of the cuts in education, especially on the arts, and they organized the protest.

Tammy Hess came to the demonstration with her three children, ages 3, 10 and 11. The oldest two go to Woolslair Elementary School. "I am here about education. They need to stop all the cuts. We need education and we need bus drivers. Everybody should be treated equally.

"They should tax the rich. Everybody needs things like education, healthcare and jobs. These are not things that should be cut. They are programs that should be expanded.

"The classes are going to be larger and that makes it harder for teachers to teach and children to learn. The government should be supporting the teachers and not

slamming them. They have cut the libraries, art, music and many other programs. It is not fair to the kids. All Corbett cares about is the rich, not the working class and poor.”

Sandra Henry was there with her granddaughter who is in the 4th grade. She lives near the site of the protest and decided to join in when she saw others there. Her granddaughter, who is in her second year of violin study, was concerned that she would be losing her music lessons. “Music is an important part of schools. It gives the kids an outlet, but it also helps their minds to learn. Teachers are important. Education is the cornerstone of a person. Without it what is going to happen with our children?”

Sandra and her husband have 17 grandchildren. She said, “We are always doing things to help them. I worked nights so that I can take care of them during the day, so they didn’t have to be put in day care. I help my kids just like my mother helped me and my grandmother helped my mother.

“The politicians don’t care about what happens to us. If children don’t get an education, how are they going to get a job? This will lead to more and more crime. Education is a right that should be there for everyone.”

The organizers of Saturday’s march centered all their criticism of the Corbett administration and sought to win support for Obama and the Democrats. Phyllis Scherrer explained to those she spoke with that many of the current cuts are the result of cuts made by the previous Democratic administration of Governor Ed Rendell and the Obama administration.

She said, “Obama has gone further than Bush with his ‘race to the top.’ He is pushing the privatization of public education by cutting money from schools while giving trillions to the banks.” Scherrer explained that workers needed their own political party based on a socialist program that would ensure equality among all people.

When Scherrer criticized the Obama administration’s education agenda, teachers at the protest insisted on calling it a “Race to the Bottom.”

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party distributed about 150 copies of the election statement along with nearly a hundred copies of the statement “Defend Public Education.” Many people signed up for more

information about the campaign and to receive the election newsletter.



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