

# LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD

—A personal message from **Frank VanderSloot**

I was still in high school when Kitty Genovese was murdered in front of her New York City apartment in 1964. But the story of her death had a serious impact on me. Thirty-seven people had heard her cries for help while her attacker stabbed her dozens of times over a half-hour period. But not a single person came to her aid. The story became national news. The entire nation was in disbelief. Everyone was asking why no one stepped forward to help or even call the police. When the bystanders were interviewed, they had all kinds of excuses. “I thought someone else would do it.” “I didn’t know she was hurt that bad.” “I did not want to risk becoming involved.”

Sandpoint, Idaho, where I grew up, is a long way from New York City. But Kitty Genovese’s story caused me to make some serious promises to myself as a young man. I did not ever want to be found guilty of what those New York City bystanders were guilty of. I vowed that if I were ever in a situation where someone was being hurt or treated unfairly, I would not be counted as a bystander. I had no idea how that promise would impact the rest of my life. Throughout the years, I’ve gotten into a lot of trouble trying to stay true to that commitment.

Although my family lived far below the poverty line while I was growing up, my life has now been blessed with resources far beyond what I deserve. I often see situations where I can help. I’m especially drawn to situations where things are being done unfairly to someone else or where someone has an unfair advantage. If a mother doesn’t have the funds to file for divorce in an abusive situation, we will get involved. If someone is being attacked unfairly by the press, we will get involved. If someone with deep pockets is trying to buy an election, we will try to level the playing field.

There is a lot of unfairness in the world. I certainly don’t believe that it is fair that my family has prospered so greatly while others are struggling. I have lived about two-thirds of my life struggling financially and about one-third of my life in prosperity. I prefer prosperity, but I believe a huge responsibility rests on those who have resources to use those resources fairly and responsibly to the benefit of society as a whole.

It is no secret that the stranglehold the unions have had on our education system has done American schools a lot of damage. I was thrilled to learn two years ago that Governor Butch Otter and the Idaho Legislature had taken on the challenge of education reform in Idaho. Although the legislation they created is not perfect, it’s really good. Anyone who cares about children will be in favor of Propositions 1, 2 and 3. The new laws take control of our schools away from unions and place it in the hands of local school boards and parents. But, as expected, the NEA (the Washington, D.C. national teachers union) has decided to spend millions of dollars trying to undo the good work of Governor Otter and the Idaho Legislature. Neither the state of Idaho nor the school boards have any funds to fight the union. Local school boards against the deep pockets of the NEA is an unfair fight. That is why Melaleuca has decided to try to level the playing field. We don’t have nearly enough funds to match the national unions. But we can’t stand idly by.

Many wanted to donate anonymously, but their funds have been tied up because of legal maneuverings. Their desire to stay anonymous is understandable. Many individuals and companies are afraid to fight the union, after all, and this has been a very vicious campaign. The unions have made personal threats to individuals and companies who support the legislation. They threatened our state senators and state representatives with their careers if they voted in favor of the legislation. Superintendent Tom Luna was threatened. His car was vandalized, his tires were slashed and his mother was accosted while she was at home. When I went to testify at the Senate hearings, union president Sheri Wood accosted me and threatened to call for a boycott on Melaleuca. Because of the personal risk that individuals or companies take when they speak out against the union, I don’t believe we should judge them for asking that their donations in support of Propositions 1, 2 and 3 not be disclosed. But someone had to take a stand to try to get accurate information out about the Propositions. Because the Propositions are so important to our children’s future, Melaleuca decided not to be a bystander.

I have a great deal of respect for Idaho teachers. I had some wonderful teachers in my youth. Great teachers change lives! Some teachers have said that when people criticize the union, the union is really the teachers. I don’t believe that. The teachers I know are not dishonest. The teachers I know would never misrepresent the truth to the degree that the union ads do about the Propositions. The teachers I know would not be trying to misinform the public. Unfortunately, the teachers have been misinformed by their own union. Make no mistake. The teachers are not the union. In some ways, the teachers are victims of the union.

We hope that people will not believe the union rhetoric about the Propositions. Neither should they take our word for what the Propositions do. People should study the Propositions for themselves. And when they do, we believe that anyone who cares about kids and cares about education will vote in favor of the Propositions. Propositions 1 and 2 are by far the most important. Proposition 1 has been endorsed by the Idaho School Boards Association. That’s because school boards simply cannot do their job without Proposition 1. Please study the Propositions in detail and vote as an educated voter.

—Frank L. VanderSloot

Those who are interested in exactly what the Propositions do should go to **[IdahoStudentsComeFirst.com](http://IdahoStudentsComeFirst.com)**

## Proposition 1:

- ✓ Gives school boards the ability to negotiate on current issues instead of being boxed in by contracts decided decades earlier.
- ✓ Allows parents to have input on teacher and principal job performance evaluations as determined by the local school districts.
- ✓ Ensures student achievement is reflected in a portion of teacher and principal evaluations.
- ✓ Phases out tenure, or lifetime contracts, for teachers. Tenure makes it almost impossible to take appropriate corrective action on poorly performing teachers.
- ✓ Guarantees transparency as negotiations must now be done in open meetings rather than behind closed doors.
- ✓ Opens communication with all teachers, not just those appointed to be involved in negotiations.

## Proposition 2:

- ✓ Implements a statewide pay-for-performance plan for teachers, through which teachers can earn bonuses in addition to their base salaries.
- ✓ Prior to this law, teachers were paid on a formula based only on years of experience and the amount of education earned.
- ✓ Teachers are rewarded as a school for collaborating to increase the progress students show in academic achievement.
- ✓ Individually, teachers are also rewarded for taking on leadership roles and teaching in hard-to-fill positions.
- ✓ 80 percent of all teachers will receive a bonus. The average bonus will be more than \$2,000. This amounts to more than a 5 percent increase in total compensation.
- ✓ The Legislature fully funded pay-for-performance with \$38 million in new funding. This means the funds are already provided and there will be no increase in taxes.

## Proposition 3:

- ✓ Gives students a jump-start on college and careers. High school students can earn up to 36 dual college or professional-technical credits a year at no cost to students or their families. This means students can earn a year of college credits—all paid for by the state—while in high school.
- ✓ Creates equal access for all students. Every public high school will be equipped with wireless Internet.
- ✓ Provides tools and training for Idaho’s teachers. Idaho has invested \$4 million a year in professional development for teachers along with investments in instructional technology at all grade levels, not just high school.
- ✓ Creates a 21st century learning environment for every child. The state-provided laptop or electronic tablet becomes the student’s textbook, word processor and calculator.
- ✓ Our schools are demanding access to this technology.
- ✓ **PROPOSITION 3 IS COMPLETELY FUNDED. NO PROPERTY TAX OR ANY OTHER TAX WILL BE INCREASED!**

For more information, visit **[IdahoStudentsComeFirst.com](http://IdahoStudentsComeFirst.com)**