

THREAT TO EDUCATION QUALITY

Decision to cut teaching posts is short-sighted

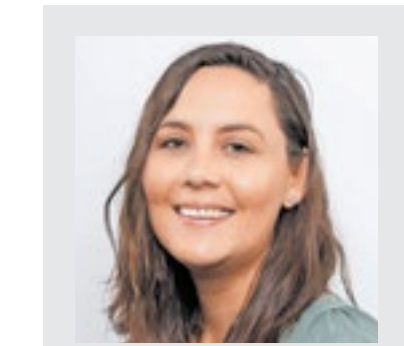
AS WE joined the global community in celebrating World Teachers' Day on Saturday, we must also acknowledge our teachers' invaluable role in shaping the future of our nation and the world. Their dedication, passion, and commitment to nurturing young minds are the cornerstone of a thriving society.

However, a dark cloud hangs over the education sector in South Africa as the government's decision to cut budgets affecting teaching posts, particularly in the Western Cape, threatens to undermine the quality of education our children receive.

The recent announcement by the Western Cape Education Department to reduce teaching posts across the province is deeply concerning. As highlighted in recent reports across news outlets and social media platforms, this move jeopardises the livelihoods of thousands of dedicated educators and has far-reaching implications for our education system. Class sizes will inevitably increase, leading to a decline in the quality of instruction and personalised attention that learners deserve.

Furthermore, the potential loss of experienced teachers will significantly impact the continuity of education. Teachers who have built strong relationships with their learners and developed effective teaching methods will be irreplaceable. The departure of such educators will create a void that will be difficult to fill, particularly in disadvantaged communities where access to quality education is already limited.

The decision to cut teaching posts extends beyond its immediate impact on individual teachers and learners. It has broader implications for the future of South Africa. A weakened education system can lead to a decline in economic growth, increased social



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inequality, and a rise in crime rates. Investing in education is an investment in the nation's future, and the decision to cut teaching posts (rather than other higher-ranking and paying positions from perhaps district offices) is a short-sighted one that will have long-term consequences.

Beyond the challenges they face, teachers in South Africa and around the world deserve to be celebrated for their unwavering dedication and commitment to their learners. In the post-pandemic era, teachers have taken on an even greater responsibility, providing support, pastoral care, and emotional guidance to their learners. They have gone far beyond traditional teaching and assessment practices, ensuring the well-being of the children in their care.

While the decision to cut teaching posts is a setback, it is essential to recognise the incredible work that teachers do every day. They inspire, motivate, and empower their learners, helping them to reach their full potential. Teachers deserve to be celebrated

more often, especially by the parents of their learners. A simple thank you can go a long way in boosting a teacher's morale and encouraging them to continue their important work.

To gain a deeper understanding of the importance of teacher appreciation, I asked a group of student teachers at Stellenbosch University who recently completed their practicums to share their thoughts.

One student teacher told me that "not everyone can wake up and decide to be a teacher. It takes a special person to be a teacher. Someone that is kind, intelligent, smart, positive, strict, funny and so much more. A teacher is a friend, a mentor, a leader, the one that takes guidance, a mother, doctor, educator, supporter, motivator and a child's biggest cheerleader. A teacher has the most important job because it helps to shape the minds and hearts of learners. Here is to all the wonderful teachers – keep on doing what you love".

Another remarked that "it is no secret that teachers are an important part of society. From the content they teach to the morals and values that they instil in our future leaders, doctors, artists, and teachers. Sometimes a teacher is that role model that many children perhaps not have at home. I'm sure we all have certain teachers that we remember that had a huge impact on where we are today or played a big role in our emotional development. It's important that we appreciate teachers".

Two other student teachers emphasised the importance of supporting educators.

"I think teachers go through a lot and having their voices heard will be the biggest form of support we can offer them. Governments and education organisations need to hear the

cries of teachers more".

"It is so important to support teachers because we are more than just teachers. We are counsellors, encouragers, and strong and constant people that children rely on. We are the way to the future because we educate the future".

Their fellow student teacher said that "as an educator and an empath, my fulfilment and reward lie within the learners' achievements. I do not expect, nor will I ever ask for acknowledgement. I do think that small gifts of appreciation from learners such as notes, drawings, and maybe some sweet treats do in fact reassure educators that they are doing a good job and that the learners trust and value them".

The experiences of these student teachers underscore the importance of recognising and celebrating the work of teachers. May it serve as a call to action for all of us to support and advocate for our educators.

It is essential that we invest in our teachers and provide them with the support and resources they need to thrive. This includes adequate salaries, professional development opportunities, and a conducive working environment. By valuing and empowering our teachers, we can create a brighter future for South Africa and the world.

The decision to cut teaching posts is a disservice to our children, who deserve the best possible opportunities to succeed. We must stand united in demanding that the government reconsider this harmful policy.

Let us also advocate for policies that support their well-being and ensure quality education for all. By investing in our teachers, we are paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future of our nation.

QUICK READ

CLIMATE WARNING

INCREASINGLY intense floods and droughts were a "distress signal" of what was to come as climate change made the planet's water cycle ever more unpredictable, the UN said yesterday.

Last year the rivers were their driest for more than 30 years, glaciers suffered their largest loss of mass in half a century and there were also a significant number of floods, the UN's World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said in the State of Global Water Resources Report.

"Water is the canary in the coal mine of climate change," WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said. "We receive distress signals in the form of increasingly extreme rainfall, floods and droughts which wreak a heavy toll."

At present, 3.6 billion people have insufficient access to fresh water at least once a month, according to the UN. This is forecast to rise to 5 billion by 2050.

The UN wants freshwater resources to be monitored better, so early warning systems can reduce the damage to the people and wildlife who rely on them to survive. | AFP

IMAGE OF THE DAY



A CUSTOMS control sniffer dog stretches and yawns while he waits with his handler outside the French Ministry for the Economy and Finances in Paris during an interministerial seminar on the fight against money laundering and terrorism yesterday. | AFP

ELECTIONS

US expats have vital role to play at polls

CHARLES BELK

MOST of us, at one point or another in our lives, have had to make tough decisions. Leadership is defined by embracing that the needs of the many, far outweigh the needs of the few. President Joe Biden's decision to step aside earlier this year demonstrated true leadership in making what, by far, had to be one of the hardest decisions of his life. However, the road ahead for the country is still as tough as it was before.

It's estimated that there are 6.5 million US citizens living abroad who can vote, but less than 14% actually do. Active participation by all citizens, domestic and abroad, is more important than ever in the upcoming election.

It is easy to forget about voting when you're outside of the United States. Don't! One person (one vote) can make a difference; even from abroad.

In August 2014, I was wrongfully arrested – mistakenly identified as the wrong tall, black male, suspected of being involved in a bank robbery. As a result of that incident, and inspired by a speech in September of that year by then president Barack Obama, I became an "Active Citizen" to right

that which had been wrong – an innocent citizen wrongfully arrested, later released as innocent, but still having an arrest record. By working with state legislators, my "AutoErase" criminal justice reform language has been included in newly created laws in over 20 states. These new laws will now "automatically erase" (expunge) arrest records of individuals whose arrests were dropped or never prosecuted. This year marks the 10-year anniversary of that incident and it all started by motivation from someone that I helped elect.

In September 2016, again inspired by words from Obama, I took on a personal mission to campaign across central and eastern North Carolina supporting Hillary Clinton for president and all of the Democrats on the North Carolina ballot. I was fully behind Clinton's campaign because she had a published, comprehensive, criminal justice reform plan that was up front and clear.

That November, after the election, I left the US and started working remotely from various countries. I found that life in a foreign country was less stressful. My life, well, took on a "different life", one that only involved the US if I happened to be across CNN, or went home to visit my mom.

Now, with 83 countries under my belt, I find it quite easy to forget about the problems in my hometown community, city, state... and yes, country! You give me a week in my US hometown, and I am writing to elected city officials about potholes. But let me live abroad for a few months, and I can easily forget election dates, and even the importance of an election. Fortunately, I registered for Absentee Voting at VoteFromAbroad.org, so my county board of elections back in Durham, North Carolina sends me my ballot each election.

As the world seemingly gets smaller and closer because of more and more traveling, borders disappear. But allegiance to our home base should always remain. We become expats but hold on to our US citizenship. We are still voters and many of us even belong to organisations like Democrats Abroad, because what happens in the US matters and matters beyond its borders.

Just because something might not be a problem you experience directly, it still can personally affect you. As Americans Abroad, we sometimes make our new country's problems our problems, and forget about the problems back home. We need to remain active citizens, even while living outside the country. Abroad we see and

face challenges related to passports, visas, and taxes, as well as the impact of US foreign policy and varying levels of basic human rights.

With the number of Americans living abroad steadily increasing, there are a good number of us that will truly leave the problems of the US behind. But for this election, we each need to find our "personal" – that one thing that helps you understand how this election personally affects you. Find your "personal" ... and do more than just vote; engage others, recruit others, and vote early!

I encourage all Americans Abroad, including those in the US military, and especially my fellow black Americans living abroad, to step up like your own well-being, your family's future, the lives of all Americans, and even the country you live in depends on it. Your vote is your voice, your decision for how you want the country to move forward.

Overseas voting has begun, let's ensure our ballots count! US citizens can find all the info you need in Democrats Abroad South Africa's guide *How To Vote From South Africa*.

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FOUNDED 1857

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