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University administrators may have futures in politics.

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The Preparation for Battle

Many, many years ago in a nameless western state there existed a small but feisty operations research program (OR) of the hands-on variety. This program was renowned for requiring students to do real projects in which real costs were reduced and real profits were made. It was not long before this program attracted the attention of one of the educational arms of one of our armed services. A group of officers duly visited the site, looked upon what was going on, and found it good. They then told the director of this program that they could virtually guarantee to send a goodly number of officers to be trained and educated in the mysteries of applied OR every year. Everything went swimmingly until one of the officers mentioned that it was customary that state schools (which this school happened to be) would charge only the in-state tuition for these defenders of our country. This was because they were sent there on permanent-change-of-station orders and therefore were ordered to report there for education.

The school administration had no problem with this “military discount;” however, it would require approval at the state level. This meant that a bill would have to be introduced into the legislature specifically exempting these military students from paying the full (large) out-of-state tuition. An understanding member of the legislature was found to introduce the required bill, and in the fullness of time, the bill was scheduled to appear before the feared Joint Budget Committee (JBC).

The First Meeting

A school vice president, known and respected for his sagacity, was selected to shepherd the bill through and shortly thereafter a meeting was held between the VP and the chairman of the JBC.

The VP was somewhat surprised to see that the JBC chairman had already run the numbers on the fiscal effect of this bill and was distinctly negative about the bill being passed. His position was that the school was proposing that 10 or 12 military officers every year were going to get

1. A two- or three-year vacation, goofing off, in a beautiful vacation state while going to school at the taxpayers’ expense and, to top it off,

2. Wanted the taxpayers of said state to give them a discount while they did it.

Now, the VP was flabbergasted at this reaction. He pointed out that the officers were hardly goofing off but were working on a degree at one of the toughest schools in the West. A frank exchange of views took place. The JBC chairman told him flatly that there was no way in hell that his committee was going to pass a bill that allowed an armed service to “suck up the taxpayers’ money” for military education with no limit.
The VP said, while shaking hands, that he understood perfectly but he would still like his bill considered at the next JBC meeting. The chairman told him it was a waste of everybody’s time as it would surely fail; but he did schedule it.

**The Second Meeting (That Never Happened)**

When the chairman of the JBC appeared to start the next meeting, he noticed that not all was as it usually was. First, the room, usually empty, was full of apparently angry, aged gentlemen wearing Veteran’s of Foreign Wars and American Legion caps. He also noticed the presence of two of the local TV news trucks with their attached investigative reporters.

The JBC chairman, detecting a rodent, casually inquired of the smiling VP what in blazes was going on here. The now broadly smiling VP explained: “Well, Senator, you are going to get a chance on television to explain to these veterans why soldiers who are sent here for training are classified as second-class citizens and have to pay out-of-state tuition. And after you answer that question (on television), we will literally roll out the local president of the Disabled American Veterans so you can explain it to him.”

Needless to say, the hardened heart of the JBC chairman, under the circumstances, melted under the combined lenses of Channel 4, Channel 7, the veterans (not to mention, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV)), and the immediate passage of the bill was unanimous. In the local-news portion of the next day’s newspaper, under an appropriate headline, there was a picture of the JBC, surrounded by cheering veterans, some disabled, all in front of an American flag, which fortuitously appeared as a backdrop.

On their way out the door after the committee meeting was over, the JBC chairman took the VP aside and said: “You know, if you ever have enough of academia, I think there is little question after today’s performance that you boys have a future in politics.”

**Epilogue**

“To fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting” (Tzu 1983, p. 15).

**Reference**