

Youth Get Their Chance to Speak Out

By Supervisor Federal Glover

Watching the 500 to 600 kids at the Pittsburg City Hall last March 20 marching for immigration rights and immigration law reform pointed out significant differences and similarities between my generation and theirs.

For me, the cause was civil rights and political empowerment. We were as fervent in our beliefs as today's youngsters are in theirs. In both cases it is about social justice.

Adding significance to the event, as fate would have it, Congress began talking about much needed reforms in immigration the same week that marks the birthday of Cesar Chavez, one of America's great champions of human rights

For the most part, the kids -- and I really mean kids, a good number were from Pittsburg's Central Junior High School so some were 13-, 14-years old -- were well-behaved and were earnest in behalf of their cause.

It was the internet and a few radio DJs that made this demonstration possible. Through myspace.com and some Spanish-speaking radio hosts, thousands of kids throughout the state and country skipped school to make a statement about immigration reforms. They kept in contact with each other by calling on their cell-phones or texting.

From iPods to Blackberry's to cell-phones, one of the major ways young people today are so different from my generation is their access to information. It is as easy as a click of a button. One click and the entire worldwide web can open up, literally at their fingertips.

Most parents hadn't heard about myspace.com. We thought we were in the know when we learned about craigslist, that electronic listing of wide-ranging subjects based in the East Bay. On craigslist you can join discussion groups, find a job, find an apartment, make travel arrangements, establish a relationship and just about anything else.

For kids, myspace.com is light years ahead of craigslist in terms of creating a place for young people wishing to connect with other people. It does more than connect. It allows people to establish an identity. It instantly gratifies the need for young people to proclaim their individuality: "I am unique!" "I am so interesting." "I'm cool." "I'm hip." "Hey world, dig me!"

At myspace, anyone can get their own web page. You can post your favorite music, pictures, poems or videos. It is all about you, or, at least, how you want the world to see you.

The danger is that from this cacophony of information there is a lot of disinformation. Too often, kids use myspace.com to create a fictional character posing as them, or the way they wish they are perceived. Internet predators scroll through looking for easy prey.

The wild popularity of myspace.com tells us that kids are eager to be heard, to be more than a lost voice in the wilderness.

One way we are trying to hear those youthful voices is through the Contra Costa County Youth Summit that will be held at Freedom High School on April 22.

Young people from all over the county will attend presentations ranging from life after high school, preparing for college, preventing sexual assault, diversity, resisting the lure of the “gangsta” lifestyle, how to prepare for a college interview to developing a positive mental attitude.

There will also be an opportunity for young people to voice their concerns. Subjects can range from school uniforms; “freakin’,” the dance that has parents freaking to the point where it is being banned at school dances; where can kids hang out with each other without being labeled loiterers or troublemakers; or any other topic young people want to talk about; perhaps even how immigration laws affect their lives.

It won’t be all talk. To break up the presentations, there will be a step show, a DJ, a graffiti board, games, lunch, a list of fun things to do in our county and a speech by 49er Jeremy Newberry, who grew up in Antioch.

The Youth Summit is a county version of the citywide youth summit that I initiated when I was a Pittsburg City Council member. In fact, I helped kick off the first countywide youth summit, which was held in Pittsburg attended by hundreds of young people. This will be the second countywide gathering and I hope attendance will be even greater.

Cost for the Summit is only \$10, the price of a movie. Group discounts are available if you get your club or school to get 15 or more to attend. For more information call 925-625-7042.

One ray of hope can be seen by the actions by the young immigration demonstrators. Considering the pressures they are under from peers and the marketplace, imagine, teen-agers concerned about what’s going on in Washington instead of who they are taking to the prom or what to wear the next day. They were thinking beyond themselves, which is all too rare these days.

The lack of civic involvement, not only by young people, but by adults as well, is one of the byproducts of living in a commuter-centric community. We hope the students continue to speak out and become involved in something larger than themselves. They get another chance this April 22.

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