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Cerabino: Scott's major gripe has minor ring of truth

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I was ready to skewer our beloved governor over his most recent attack on education.

It seemed like a slam dunk. Gov. Rick Scott got the idea that students who receive state money to attend Florida colleges and universities ought to be studying science, technology, engineering and math.

"If I'm going to take money from a citizen to put into education, then I'm going to take that money to create jobs," Scott told *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune* editorial board last week. "So I want that money to go to degrees where people can get jobs in this state."

The idea that the overriding aim of education is to be employed and that employment is dependent on technical fields of study is a double-scoop of nonsense.

After all, one of the biggest job creators in Florida has been former Walt Disney Co. chief executive officer Michael Eisner, who majored in English and wrote plays for his college's drama club. And English is the most common undergraduate major among students admitted to the University of Florida's medical school, a university career counselor told me.

Studying the Neanderthal

It ought to be obvious that a liberal arts education is its own reward, and society reaps the benefit of an educated populace. So yes, it would have been easy to mock Scott.

He even made things worse for himself by singling out anthropology as a particularly unsuitable major to be supported by taxpayer-funded scholarship programs.

"Is it a vital interest of the state to have more anthropologists?" Scott asked. "I don't think so."

Within hours, the American Anthropological Association was already outing Scott as a Neanderthal.

"Perhaps you are unaware that anthropologists are leaders in our nation's top science fields, making groundbreaking discoveries in areas as varied as public health, human genetics, legal history, bilingualism, African-American heritage and infant learning," the association's executive director William E. Davis wrote Scott.

The dangers of nontechnical majors

And wait, that's not all. Scott's own daughter graduated from college with a degree in anthropology. And somehow, she managed to get a job as a special education teacher.

So, yes. It would have been too easy to point out the folly of implying that people who study nontechnical disciplines aren't worth the public money invested in them.

But then I made the mistake of looking at the academic backgrounds of Florida's lawmakers. And that's when I saw the dangers of encouraging students to study the so-called soft majors.

They could end up finding work making Florida's laws.

The two most powerful legislators in Tallahassee are Speaker of the House Dean Cannon, a journalism major from the University of Florida, and Senate President Mike Haridopolous, who has a master's degree in history from the University of Alabama.

Haridopolous will yield the leadership of the Florida Senate next year to Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville, who majored in religion and political science at Troy State University.

The Florida Legislature is riddled with nontechnical majors.

Sen. Miguel Diaz de la Portilla, R-Miami, majored in philosophy and English literature at the University of Miami.

Rep. Jeff Clemens, D-Lake Worth, got his journalism degree at Michigan State University, while Rick Kriseman, D-St. Petersburg, majored in broadcasting at the University of Florida.

Rep. Gayle B. Harrell, R-Stuart, got a Spanish degree at the University of Florida.

Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala, double majored at Florida State University in sociology and psychology. House Education Committee member Rep. Marti Coley, R-Mariana, was an English major at Florida State. And fellow Seminole, Rep. Clay Ingram, R-Pensacola, was a communication/political science major.

The list goes on. All these wasted lives, the products of bull-major educations at public-supported universities. Very sad.

So I'm not going to criticize Scott on this one.

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