

## Steve Scauzillo: Schooling Santorum on state universities

Posted:

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THEY call it the silly season.

Meaning, candidates running for office sometimes say silly things on the campaign trail - things that don't reflect reality. I've put that diplomatically. See, I believe in the whole messy democratic process of running for office, of endless primaries and raucous debates, of candidate forums and yard signs. I'm an adherent of the "marketplace of ideas" theory of John Milton and John Stuart Mill, which says the public can sift the wheat from the chaff and arrive at truth.

I learned that from American history and media history classes I took at a California State University.

Earlier this week, GOP presidential candidate Rick Santorum delivered a campaign speech in Wisconsin and said he had read that "seven or eight of the California system of universities - don't even teach an American history course. It's not even available to be taught." He used California's universities as an example of "how bad it's gotten in this country."

Clearly, Santorum is wrong. And I'll get to how easy it is to prove that.

But first, I want to be clear. I don't mind when Santorum or Romney or President Obama speak about the differences between liberal and conservative policies. I even wrote last week how I liked to listen to the debate about health care coming out of the prominent halls of the Supreme Court. But Santorum's swipe at liberal California by saying its universities don't teach about American history is egregious. And frankly, I'm insulted, since I teach at CSUF and always bring in a great deal about American media history, as do many full-time professors.

See, I'm a product of University of California, Irvine and Cal State Fullerton. I've earned a bachelor's and a master's degree thanks to the state university system - probably the best in the nation. My two sons are currently enrolled in UCs and I can tell you they are learning about American history. My younger son, Andy, is learning a great deal about American-style capitalism in business and economics classes. So to hear someone slam these fine institutions really gets my goat.

Here's how wrong Santorum is:

CSU spokesman Mike Uhlenkamp told me that all 23 CSUs offer American history courses. In fact, all the CSUs require students to have a knowledge of American history and the Constitution as a graduation requirement.

All of the UCs except one offer American history courses and have a similar graduation requirement as the CSUs. The one exception, UCSF, is a medical school but even it offers a Ph.D in Anthropology, History and Social Medicine, according to the political blog in sfgate.com.

I did some simple sleuthing myself. I opened the online catalogs at two nearby CSUs. Both Cal State Los Angeles and Cal State Fullerton require six units in American History to graduate. Both schools offer American History up to the Civil War, and American History from the Civil War to present. In addition, CSULA offers a class on the history of the American civil rights movement.

To earn a bachelor's degree in history at Cal State Fullerton, a student must complete 12 core units: six in world civilizations and six in U.S. history. American history is half the core requirement. The 23 units of "intermediate requirements" include choices from: "World/Comparative History," "United States History," "European History," or "Non-Western History." Seems balanced to me.

I agree with Santorum who implied that students need to learn about the Constitution. I second that 100 percent. Instead of bashing schools that are doing this pretty well, why not stump for more funding for government classes in public high schools? That would be a solution, not a rant.

When I teach about opinion writing at CSUF, I start with Thomas Paine's editorial "The Crisis" which begins with the familiar words: "These are the times that try men's souls." Paine's pro-independence essays were read to the troops by General George Washington at Valley Forge.

The rest, as they say, is history.

steve.scauzillo@sgvn.com