

Bond issue could be a Trojan Horse for taxpayers

By Jay Davis and Tonchi Weaver 1/3/2020

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Welcome to 2020! If you live and vote within the Rapid City School District, you will vote on the largest school bond per-capita in South Dakota history on **February 25th**. We don't often agree on issues of policy, but we are united in our opposition to this bond. Its price tag of \$190 million will rise to **\$291 million** over the 25-year term of the bond.

A responsible school bond is specifically tailored to focus on student needs, not administration wants. Unfortunately, this bond issue contains broadly worded language, such as “other school district improvements”, a nonspecific category that could cover any expenditure.

Stevens High School needs a facility modification to accommodate its music program and a plan to address some security challenges. These legitimate needs should be covered by the district's Capital Outlay Fund, not by a bond issue that raises property taxes and drives up the cost of rent.

Rapid City High School has been a life-line for at-risk students, helping them to ‘hang in there’ and graduate. The flexibility, individual attention and central location for students who lack transportation have made RCHS a successful community asset. **The bond issue evicts RCHS from its present location with no plan for relocation.**

Wilson and three other elementary schools - Horace Mann, Robbinsdale and Canyon Lake, are going to be closed or demolished under the district's impractical plan. Most are functional, even historic buildings that could be repaired and retrofitted and continue serving their neighborhoods. We already demolish too many viable structures and overload our landfills at an alarming rate.

For taxpayers, this bond may be a Trojan Horse. A tax increase of **\$.85 per \$1000 taxable value** is unlikely to be enough to pay the interest on the debt. If that's the case, **once the bond is approved, the School Board can further raise property taxes at any time without permission from the voters.**

A special election in February, our coldest and most storm-prone month, should only occur as a last resort. It may be difficult – or dangerous – to get to the polls, and **the \$67,000 cost to taxpayers is wasteful and insulting.** June elections are already scheduled, and this bond vote should have been scheduled then. **The waters were further muddied when the local Superintendent and Police Chief pressured the County Auditor to move polling places out of schools, in a move perceived as voter suppression.**

Absentee voting begins January 27 at the Pennington County Auditor's office. Vote early to make sure your voice is heard. Rapid City School District stretches into Summerset, Hermosa, Caputa, Johnson Siding and Three Forks near Hill City. If your voter registration card “school district” listing begins with “514”, you CAN VOTE on this bond! For complete and accurate information, go to: www.rcasforward.org Join us in voting NO on this ill-conceived plan.

About the Authors:

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