

Not Supporting Rock Island School Referendum

Written by administrator

Wednesday, 30 January 2008 02:20

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I'm a big fan of Rock Island/Milan School District #41. Now and in the past it has provided quality education for the community, my children included, and leads the Quad Cities in any number of educational areas.

But I cannot support the February 5 referendum to restructure the district's schools.

Here are my reasons:

Building a new \$9-million school while eliminating three existing and viable schools baffles me completely.

With the decrease in school population there is no need to build an expensive new school. To borrow a cliché: Aren't we putting the cart before the horse?

The restructuring was supposed to save money for the district. Instead it will end up in 20 years, when all of the plan's spending incentives are in place, costing close to \$35 million.

Much of that cost will not go to education or even infrastructure. Rather it will go to interest: \$13 million over 20 years.

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A new school, estimated to cost \$9 million, will actually cost close to \$17 million because of interest payments for 20 years.

Building a new school, as is happening almost everywhere in America, will not automatically bring parents clamoring to live and educate their children in Rock Island.

New is not inherently better. It would be hard to prove that more learning takes place in new buildings. I learned in a series of "old" schools, as did most of you. And Rocky High is 70 years old - older than two of the three schools scheduled to be discarded.

Community-development groups and experts should handle economic development. The school board and its dedicated staff should handle education. That's it - education.

A magnet school does not have to be new to be attractive, nor does it have to be centrally located; witness the success of Horace Mann, which is almost in Moline.

Approval of the referendum does indeed mean a tax raise, despite statements to the contrary. It is a tax raise no matter how you phrase it. At the end of 2017, when the present referendum is paid off, our school tax rate will go down 51 cents per \$100 of valuation, from \$5.11 to \$4.60. That's a 10-percent reduction in school taxes.

If the referendum is passed, taxes will go up from that \$4.60 back to \$5.11. That is a 10-percent raise in the tax rate. Call it what you will: If it isn't a tax increase, what is all the hubbub about?

A science and math magnet school would make more sense as a middle or junior high, enrolling students who have had a chance to show interests and preliminary aptitudes in that direction. What would a first-grader learn in such a school that he or she couldn't learn in a regular school?

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For that matter, the proliferation of magnet and choice schools will cause a "brain drain" from our neighborhood schools. And these special schools will only be doing what each of our neighborhood schools have always done and should continue to do - educate primary-aged kids in math, science, and the fine arts - along with all the other needed areas.

In a world of increased pollution and energy consciousness and cost, transportation is nothing to be ignored. A new, central mega-school, and the elimination of three close-to-home neighborhood schools, would increase real transportation costs. How many of the new school's 550 young children would - or even could - safely walk or bike across town to this school?

And in a "green" world of sustainability and carbon footprints, reusing and rehabbing old schools is certainly better than throwing them away for the latest new thing. Rock Island boasts one of the best recycling programs in the area; let's extend that to our schools.

Having supported most of the past referendums, I would gladly vote "yes" for a referendum that would raise money for incentives in science, fine arts, math - the whole gamut. I would also vote for a Rock Island "Promise," for programs to raise our graduation rate (the lowest in the Quad Cities), for acquiring super-qualified teachers, and for other programs focused on children and teaching.

But I am not going to vote for a 10-percent increase in school taxes for a new, very large school.

I plan to vote "no" and send a message to the school board to focus more on education and less on construction.

Chuck Oestreich

Rock Island

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A Roadblock, Not a Getaway

Thanks for publishing Greg Francisco's outstanding letter "[Legalize, Regulate, and Tax](#) ." (See *River Cities' Reader* Issue 667, January 16-22, 2008.)

It seems to me that in order to properly evaluate our nation's drug policies, we need to compare and contrast our drug policies with those of another nation with substantially different drug policies. I suggest that we use the Czech Republic for our comparison.

In the Czech Republic, citizens can legally use, possess, grow, or purchase small quantities of marijuana.

In the United States, many otherwise law-abiding citizens are locked in prison cages for possessing, growing, or selling various amounts of marijuana.

The Czech overall drug arrest rate is 1 per 100,000 population. The U.S. overall drug arrest rate is 585 per 100,000 population. The Czech robbery rate is 2 per 100,000 population. The U. S. robbery rate is 160.2 per 100,000 population, according to the FBI.

According to our drug-war cheerleaders, tolerant marijuana laws cause people to use other, much more dangerous drugs like meth and heroin.

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Obviously, this doesn't happen in the Czech Republic. Why not?

Could it be that when people can legally obtain marijuana at an affordable price, they tend not to use or desire any other recreational drugs?

Could it be that marijuana legalization actually creates a roadblock to hard drug use - not a gateway?

Kirk Muse

Mesa, Arizona

It's Authenticity, Not a Product Plug

I feel the need to make an unprecedented "official" rebuke of a point made in a critic's review of a show I have directed. (See "[Rock-it Man](#)," *River Cities' Reader* Issue 668, January 23-29, 2008.) And believe me, it *is* unprecedented. I don't think it's, well, seemly for me to contest a professional critic's opinion of something I have been involved with creating. But I simply wanted to clarify something:

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What was heard as "Hotpockets" when the character's name was listed as "Hipockets" was due to an impressive imitation of a west-Texas drawl utilized by both Todd and Tom. (I was on top of the accent like "white on rice" as we say here in Texas, especially with Tom, often to the point of being belligerent.) The character's name is, in standard American English, pronounced as if it were spelled "Highpockets."

Perhaps you thought it was an idiotic error of the script; perhaps I was a bit too zealous in making sure that the accents were authentic

Ann Nieman

Coppell, Texas