

Commentary

# How is school district measuring up?

GENE PFEIFER

In 1993 and in 1999, a Silver Falls School District task force was formed. Both times my peers selected me as chairman. Why were we meeting? It was because the high school was deemed to be getting overcrowded, with talk about adding "modules". Many believed that that was a poor investment, and we recommended a new high school with the condition that the Schlador Campus be maintained for an upgraded and remodeled in-town middle school. A recent review by local experienced architects and engineers indicate that the whole 100,000 sqft campus may be seismically corrected and upgraded as a middle school for under \$10 million, versus new for \$30 to 40 million.

After two bond failures with the public owners voting 57%, "no", the majority of our current School Board continued with the intent to demolish the primary Schlador structure. Ignoring the written precedent, a \$4.5 million proposal by Dalke Construction to solve the problem economically, the current superintendent then told the board, "We have been given a directive to vacate Eugene Field and move students around". What was his solution? "Modules".

We now have a school board election. Historically, school board members are the most education-minded, fiscally responsible individuals in a community. They do not focus on delivering cookies to otherwise neglected teachers, or in referencing our building assets, suffering from the board's own failure to fix deferred maintenance, in terms of, "...lipstick on a pig."

Starting in the early 70s, in reflection of my approximate 25 years spent mostly as the chairman of the school budget committee, we had board members such as Ole Paulson, Bob Humphries, Bob Roth, Betty Kuenzi, Dennis Taylor and others who were dedicated to the excellence of our students and economic survival of our district. But unlike today, they did not allow buildings to leak or

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completely turn off the heat. We recall Ole Paulsen flicking off light switches in the gym to remind and give example to a few after school students that they did not need all the lights on to play "horse".

Let's refresh our memory about other actions resultant from most of the current Board in recent times. Does this reflect the historically friendly town of Silverton, which is now vested with the responsible title of "The Garden City of Oregon" or the same example and training we or our children have benefited from over the years?

Mild mannered ex-board member, Dave Beeson, had been publicly labeled as "arrogant" numerous times in board meetings when sincerely expounding on the concerns of teachers and the lack of thorough investigation into local fiscal solutions.

The superintendent has repeatedly hired big time consultants, spending funds that depleted general fund resources.

Without a consensus of the public, money for "modules", not long-term improvements, over \$2 million was borrowed without proven resources for repayment. The district property on Steel Hammer was sold prematurely, a year before the housing market improved, for a cash shortage of about \$500,000. Eugene Field, with a district functional value of about \$10 million a year ago, was listed for sale for \$1.5 million and has now been reduced to \$1.1 million.

Rather than evaluating a functional 8 classroom remodel design provided them in advance, and which had rest-

rooms to code, a principal's office, library, and conference rooms, the Board went along with the superintendent's wish to continue the crony relationship with the same architect who designed both phases of the expensive new high school. More money has been spent on just used "modules" than the permanent repurposing of the shop building would have cost.

Students now using the "modules" must be escorted outside to use the restrooms.

The new elementary covered play shed, incorrectly designed relative to drainage and wind, has muddy children returning to the classroom.

Property in control by the district by means of "first right of refusal" was recently purchased on the end of Grant Street for about \$250,000,00 for "additional parking" when not necessary; and in conflict with other major cash flow priorities.

Without venting the issue for citizens' opinion, the superintendent, in an action that was negligent to the public an extremely bad example to our impressionable students regarding "true sustainability" and "responsibility," cut down the two giant Sequoia trees on the Schlador Campus at James Street. These trees were not only integral to the school property but of the whole extended community. They were not only significant but symbolic of Silverton, historically a logging community and now a center of our farming community and the Oregon Gardens. One of these magnificent trees was 170 feet tall with an accurate circumfer-

ence of 25.5 feet.

Forty years ago the Board had specifically the trees as being an important example of us. Alternate methods, for example, a curve in the street, would have sustained them into perpetuity. The cost of removal exceeded a proven method of saving them by about \$100,000.00 when it was not urgent, and when known cash problems existed.

The current board has been fixated on new buildings rather than sustaining general fund needs.

The conclusions for the district voters to consider is if the majority of the Board are out of touch with the teaching community and the voting constituents. Inclusively, there is a lack of appropriate communication and excessive control of teacher performance by the top two paid management of SFSFD. Additionally, there is a lack of good conscience relative to fiscal responsibility and neglect of district assets. Are our elected, responsible for the utmost methods of teaching our youth and preserving our cash and physical assets, doing the same in neglecting their personal responsibilities and assets at home?

In football or other sports, when players continue to fumble the ball or neglect the play, they are recalled to the bench. The incumbents have had their chance, and need to be retired.

Finally, we have many great intelligent people in our community that will serve us well. According to the Silverton Appeal, 3/29/2017, a "political action committee" is encouraging a vote by gender. Never should anyone be labeled or discriminated against as a man or a woman, political party or faith. Never in my experience with the Silverton School boards has this been an issue in competence.

The voter owners of Silver Falls School District need to make their vote count by selecting board members capable of making decisions based on vision, not on knee-jerk reaction. Who will be accountable to sustain our long-term educational needs and goals?

## Republicans seek transparency in Legislature

TRACY LOEW  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Republican lawmakers got a hearing May 1 on three measures they say would make the Legislature's work more transparent to the public.

The proposals would require bills to carry the name of at least one senator or representative; would require amendments to state the name of the lawmaker or committee behind them; and would limit the use of "emergency clauses."

Nearly half of the bills introduced since 2003 have been at the request of an agency or committee, or otherwise lacked a legislator's name, Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, told the Senate Rules Committee.

"That allows legislators to duck and hide, potentially, from legislation

they've introduced," she said.

And no amendments before 2016 named their authors, said Sen. Alan Olsen, R-Canby.

During the 2016 session, legislators were given the option of adding their names to amendments. In the House, 70 percent of amendments had a name, and in the Senate 73 percent did.

That's not good enough, Olsen said. "If you're proud enough to write an amendment, you should be proud enough to put your name on it," he said. "Stand up and say 'I did it.'"

SJR 42 would amend the Oregon Constitution to require that every legislative measure be introduced at the request of a senator or representative. It would be subject to voters' approval at the next general election.

SB 665 would require proposed

amendments to measures to identify the name of the member or committee proposing them.

Conservative lawmakers also have been attacking the Democratic majority's increasing use of "emergency clauses," which allow legislation to take effect immediately, preventing opponents from mounting a voter referendum.

"From the perspective of the public, it could be an attempt to avoid the people having an opportunity to opine on an issue before it takes effect," said Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg.

SJR 38 would amend the Oregon Constitution to require a two-thirds majority vote in favor in each chamber to pass bills declaring an emergency, subject to voters' approval at the next general election.

Currently, measures which include an emergency declaration need only a majority vote in each chamber.

"This is just a way from our perspective to make sure the use of emergency clauses is for appropriate reasons," Kruse said.

However, the committee's chairwoman, Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, noted the bill also would give minority party legislators more power over legislation supported by the majority of Oregonians.

Only the measures' Republican sponsors testified in their favor, and no one spoke in opposition. The committee is not currently scheduled to take action on the measures.

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