

An Opinion: Passing the School Bond is About Our Kids

By Scott Laird

In mid-October, local voters will be receiving election ballots in the mail and will be asked to decide to vote on the Vernonia School Bond Measure 5-197. Hopefully, the members of our community are taking time to educate themselves fully about the issue before marking their ballots either in favor or against new schools in Vernonia. Hopefully, people in our community are talking with their neighbors and friends, asking questions, and attending meetings to get as much information as possible about why they should or shouldn't support this bond measure to raise \$13 million dollars towards new school construction.

How this community and this school district raises the rest of the money needed to build a new school campus is a complicated issue. There are many factors involved when it comes to trying to build a major unplanned project like this. There are many questions about how this project will ultimately come together. But the first major step, and the one that the entire rest of the project is waiting on, is passage of School Bond Measure 5-197.

Passing this bond will be a bit of a leap of faith. We have to believe that the people who have been working on the plan to replace our schools for the last two years will come through. If we don't believe in them and we don't pass

this bond, I don't think our alternatives are very appealing. What alternatives, you might ask? My point, exactly. I don't believe we really have too many.

Much of the discussion I've heard about the school bond has been centered on finances. Whether or not you can afford \$1.90 per one thousand dollars of assessed value in increased taxes. Hard economic times, Vernonia's expensive utility rates, increased gasoline prices, and unemployment rates have all been major parts of the discussion. I made personal finances the focus of my opinion piece last month. But it was recently pointed out to me that what has really been missing from the discussion, at least among some of our citizens, is that this school bond is really not about finances. It's about our kids. And our kids should be the focus of our discussion when talking about whether or not to support this school bond.

When we consider whether to vote Yes or No, we need to ask ourselves, "What will be best for our children?"

I believe we are obligated to provide a quality and decent facility for our students. A place where they can be excited to go to school each day. A place where they can be encouraged to learn. A place where they are given the tools and the resources to reach their full potential. A place they can be proud to call "their school."

Right now, our students are at-

tending classes in a makeshift environment. Modular classrooms, hastily repaired facilities, shared spaces, no lockers. "Temporary" and "make-do" are the conditions under which many of our students regularly attend class. If we choose to continue to send our students to these facilities under these conditions, what message are we sending to our youth? I believe we tell them that they don't matter. That they are not important. That we don't care.

I serve on the City Parks Committee, and we have a vandalism problem in Vernonia. I'm not sure that it's any worse than other towns, or any worse than it was twenty or thirty years ago. All I know is that it's disturbing to see such a lack of respect for our community-- destroyed picnic tables, graffiti, garbage left laying around. Why do people do these kinds of things? Is it because they don't care? Is it because they think no one else cares? Is it because they themselves feel disrespected?

Spend some time on the campus of Vernonia schools and you might see why our students might not feel respected. Dark hallways, smelly restrooms, poor lighting, unsafe conditions, long outside walks between classrooms. Administration and staff have done the best they can to create a positive learning environment, given what they have to work with. But is that good enough? Do we need new schools or is it OK for

our students to continue on where they are? What would be best for our children?

This country was built on the idea that parents worked hard so their children could have something better. Have more opportunity, live in a better neighborhood, have better clothes, get a good education, go to college. Many parents and grandparents sacrificed so that their children could get a head start in life. In the eighties and nineties, some of that got lost-- it became the ME generation. Whoever has the most toys wins.

Maybe it's time we got back to the idea that it's important to be willing to make sacrifices so that our children can have something better than we had. Maybe it's time that we put our children first and showed them that we respect them. That we care about them. That they are important.

Because in the end, it's really about our kids.

I believe every generation has a burden they need to shoulder, a responsibility to leave things better than we found them. Some times the burden is bigger than others, and that may not seem fair. But the reality is, if we want to do what is best for our children and we want to live here in Vernonia, new schools are our burden.

Readers Lend Their Voices...

To The Community,

Hello my name is Jake Bringman. I am a sophomore at Vernonia High School. I am a member of the Northwest Youth Rodeo Association and the Oregon Junior Bull Riders Association. I am the 2008 Junior Bullring Champion for the Northwest Youth Rodeo Association. As well as my bull riding, I lettered in wrestling last year and played on the varsity baseball team. With all of my after school activities I still maintained a 3.75 GPA and received a high honors certificate at year's end. My ultimate goal is to continue bull riding through high school and upon graduation attend the University of Las Vegas and pursue my rodeo career further.

I am currently seeking sponsors for the 2009 rodeo season. I have participated in a total of 14 rodeos this summer, and qualified for the National Finals in Shawnee, Oklahoma. I will be representing Oregon as well as our great little town of Vernonia. If you wish to sponsor me I will gladly wear your company logo on my vest. If you wish to sponsor my whole trip to the National Finals I will wear your company logo on my chaps. Any amount of sponsorship will help me to obtain my goal of attending the finals in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

I greatly thank you for considering sponsoring me and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jake Bringman

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Thank you for your continued support.

During these tough times, we frequently hear only the negative. Jobs are lost, no raises, cost of food and shelter going up.

I would like to focus on something very positive going on in our community. That is

Boise Paper and the support the company and their employees are giving to this community as they themselves are going through some very difficult times.

Over this last year, Boise has experienced a significant reduction in the number of people employed there. Funds that were readily available from the company to support community events are no longer available. What could possibly be good about that?

The answer:

Boise employees past and present are still actively involved in volunteering in our community. Those still employed are helping support many not for profit programs via payroll deduction and the company is reaching out to community not-for-profits with donations of computers, office machines, furniture and office supplies.

United Way of Columbia County has received and helped distribute over \$6200 in furniture, computers, office machines and assorted school and office supplies. These items have helped numerous community organizations, including United Way, by providing them with needed items without having to dip into their already stretched budgets. The volunteers who serve on boards, help deliver meals, etc. are crucial to the continued availability of service to those in need in our community.

Thank you to Boise and the employees both current and past who continue to support the community where they live and do business.

We are very fortunate to have such dedicated people in our community.

Sincerely

Kathye Beck

Executive Director

United Way of Columbia County

To the Editor-

Here's the hard working crew that restored my front yard. Burt and Allison worked so hard for hours to edge and weed my garden. Penny came in at the end and did her part too. I really appreciate their effort. They were wonderful to have as "slaves for a morning".

Katie Organ

Mist, Oregon



Members of the Ford Family Foundation Cohort 3 Class from Vernonia held a yard work raffle to raise money for their class project—to design and build a Community Garden in Vernonia. Pictured are Burt Tschache, raffle winner Katie Organ, Allison McLeod and Penny Costley.

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