

My comments pertain to the proposed property tax (mill levy) increase for our Eagle County public schools. I was a volunteer citizen on school budget committee meetings last winter. I am a pragmatic realist and fiscal conservative. In decision making, I like to consider what a reasonable person would do when information/facts are known and questions answered. I am also for school choice. One of those choices must be a healthy public school system. Public schools serve the vast majority of children in our district. (5,846 children in 2011-12)

This is my informed opinion regarding our local public school budget. We do not have a spending problem. We have a revenue problem. The school's revenue stream is like the fuel of an airliner, which our families are passengers on, flying across the country. A certain amount of fuel is needed to get from point A to point B no matter the head winds. Known to the pilots but not passengers is a massive fuel leak. Without fixing the problem, the airliner is precipitously going down.

Nearly all our public school revenue comes from two sources: principally state funding and also property taxes (mill levy). In combination, both of these have declined significantly the last two years and are going to continue to decline significantly. The school board has cut nearly 9 million dollars annualized/ongoing out of the budget. The seats, the luggage and some airline personnel have already been thrown off the plane.

Debt service restructuring on the newer school buildings/grounds (which were also voter approved) was considered as a potential means of lowering annual payments (much like refinancing a house) so that freed up mill levy could be applied to operations. However, this is not legally possible.

The committee advised the School Board of two options: 1. Keep cutting 2-5 million dollars year after year as State revenues for K-12 decline or, 2. Go to the voters and ask for an increase offsetting State cutbacks. Those are the only two choices.

The school board, after several months of public hearings and deliberations with staff, decided to let the citizens/voters decide. Thus ballot question 3b. 3b is our school district's only option for a longer term revenue solution. The 7 member elected School Board cannot raise property taxes. Only voters can raise taxes and put fuel in the plane.

80% of the school's budget (not debt service) is personnel and associated costs. 83% of that is school based staff: teachers, principals, counselors, aids, librarians, custodians, food service, etc. Many of these staff members, as well as district administration and transportation staff, have already been laid off. All current district employees have had reduced salaries/wages and are paying increased costs for their benefits. Class sizes have gone up. School services have been affected. Non routine school maintenance has been slashed to the bone: \$100,000 a year on \$255 million value of buildings/grounds. (A maintenance norm is closer to ½ of 1% of the value, or approximately \$1,275,000 a year.) Significant deferred maintenance on our multi-million dollar school buildings and grounds will stack up. More lay-offs are planned and continued reduction in salaries and benefits are also planned. Some individuals may ask, "So what? Everyone is suffering now." Just consider: Children in the public schools will bear the brunt of the airliner going down. Children are the passengers in the front of the education plane.

Eagle County, enhanced by our global resorts, depends on a quality professional work force in our local economic and government sectors to prosper over the long term. Eagle County schools have been attractive to families in our communities. As one woman told me, “People will not move here and buy homes here just because of the schools, but families certainly won’t move here or want to live here if the schools are not in good shape.”

What is the cost of 3b to a homeowner? \$7.86 monthly or \$94.32 annually (confirmed) for a home assessed at \$500,000. With a house-hold taxable income of >69K a year, that itemizes deductions, your net tax costs would be about \$66.20 a year. (About \$13.24 per annum per 100k of home assessment.)

The majority of the tax on residential properties will be on second home owners. It has been my experience of 31 years in the valley the majority of second home owners want the best from our valley’s work force to get the premier experience of living here part time. Our valley’s households, both permanent and second home owners, depend on quality public schools.

We, as residents and taxpayers, have relied on State funding. We can no longer do so. The State Legislature cannot appropriate what they do not have. We cannot assume they fairly would, even if they could, due to all the other accumulating state issues which require funding.

It is imperative we, Eagle County residents, assume more local control in determining our school district’s revenue, (much like CMC has).

Our School Board is justifiably concerned, likely frightened, about the outlook of the district’s future without 3b’s approval. All of us should be.

Our school district needs consistent, dependable and stable income.

Vote Yes on 3B. Support the 5,846 children in our public schools.

We have to keep this airliner flying.

Charlie Wick, Eagle