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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

The letter on March 16th regarding Jerry Brown and redevelopment failed to mention the way redevelopment works. An area is declared blighted and the property becomes part of a redevelopment project area. A bond is floated to fund the construction. This bond plus interest is paid back over 20 to 45 years using the increase in the property taxes being generated by the property improvement. In the meantime, we will have added more citizens, homes and businesses needing essential services. It's our property taxes that pay for essential services: emergency responders, fire fighters, police services and schools. Since only the original property tax rate at the time of a property being declared part of a redevelopment project goes to paying for our city's essential services, many cities with redevelopment projects are falling short of money to pay for essential services. Hence, fire stations are being closed, teachers and police are being laid off. The bond debt must be paid first and foremost or the investment rating of the city is put in jeopardy. In addition, by law 20% of the redevelopment bond money has to be used to construct low income housing.

Tish Gleason

Orinda

Editor:

Over the past two years there have been various articles and letters regarding the funding of MOFD by the taxpayers of Orinda and Moraga. Orinda's Revenue Enhancement Task Force and later FAIR and other individuals claim that Orinda taxpayers are paying over a million dollars per year more than they should in funding MOFD. MOFD, Ellen Dale and now former MOFD director Gene Gottfried counter that those analysis have been "thoroughly discredited". If I remember correctly, Orinda left ConFire and formed MOFD because the Orinda taxpayers were told by their city leaders that they were paying more than was coming back to serve them. Is this not happening again? Who has "thoroughly discredited" the notion that we are not again paying too much? The City? MOFD? Gene Gottfried? We hear others calling for a city task force to clear the air and discover the facts. I agree that this would be much more fruitful than listening to various parties tossing allegations back and forth in the press.

Rusty Hay

Orinda

Editor:

I think it is pretty obvious that many roads in Lafayette (and the rest of Lamorinda) need work. I personally will vote against any measure that is too general in nature. What I would support and I there are others like me, would be a measure that is also a business plan. It would spell out which roads would be repaired, the approximate cost of the repair and the time line.

I do feel that we need more taxes to deal with our issues in this state. On the other hand, I am fed up with vague measures that end up allowing money to be directed at things other than the problem we thought we were voting for.

We have lived in the area since 1980 and have supported, among others, three bond issues for the 4th bore. In every one of these, a study was done and 'consultants' were paid multi-hundred thousand dollars.

Start putting straight forward measures on the ballot, clear about how the money will be used and we will all be surprised at the level of support.

Leonard Dorin

Lafayette

Lafayette Measure B

Editor:

A longtime Lafayette resident, I have taught for 9 years at Happy Valley School, and my children grew up attending Lafayette schools from kindergarten through high school. I write to you as citizen, educator, and parent. Over the years I have witnessed firsthand the strength of our schools: small class sizes, curriculum strong in core academics and the arts, and a supportive community that regards the education of its children as a sound investment.

After two years of significant reductions in state funding, and corresponding efforts to meet those shortfalls, we have reached a point where the current structural deficit threatens to

impact our students as never before. I support Measure B because it is an effort to provide emergency, stable funding to help retain those programs that make Lafayette schools special.

Funds provided by this measure will be directed to the schools, not the administration. They will not bring back what has already been lost, but without them, our students will experience a much different program than my children did. It is particularly sad for me to see, as a teacher, how the decline in funding has already impacted our students. I

know that without Measure B, the immediate effect on the quality of Lafayette schools will be dramatic and alarming. When the schools falter, the desirability of the city soon follows. Please help support Measure B.

Sincerely,
Kim Stern
Lafayette

Editor:

Preserving important Lafayette Elementary academic programs in these difficult days is critical. As a past school board member I have seen how important it is to come together as a community to maintain the highest quality coursework possible. Once a program is lost it is impossible to regain it.

Measure B will allow us to keep our schools in the top 10% of the state. Measure B can't possibly fix all that ails the state but it can help maintain the excellence we have all come to expect in our community by allowing us to keep our funds local. Measure B will allow us to maintain the best of the best. None of the money will go to the state funds. Instead it will go 100% directly into the classroom which is where it belongs.

As those of us who no longer have children in the classroom we remember how important this is and we also know that good schools protect our property values.

So I hope you will please join me in voting Yes on Measure B.

Sincerely,
Judy Carney
Lafayette

Editor:

Why YES is the only answer:

If we are a young family, our most important question is: where are the best public schools? If our children are in school, we ask: are our children getting the highest quality education from premier teachers? If we are seniors wishing to downsize, we ask: who is most likely to purchase this home where we raised our children? This cycle continues every generation and that is why we all chose Lafayette. Measure B is key to ensuring Lafayette continues to be the answer, because:

- 100% of Measure B funds stay in Lafayette (invest locally!)
- 100% go directly to elementary and middle school classroom instruction
- \$176 per parcel means just 50 cents a day (less than half the cost of a small coffee!), or less than \$15 a month
- Best News: Measure B is a temporary fix to an emergency situation, and sunsets in four years.

Measure B is not a tax, it's an investment....in our homes, our children, our community. Great public schools are the proud legacy each generation has left for the next in Lafayette. We cannot take and not give back, because Lafayette citizens have never done this. We need to sustain this legacy. YES, these are challenging economic times. YES, California, and Lafayette, public education have been dealt a huge blow. This is why YES ON MEASURE B is the only vote that sustains our long-term investment. Whether we are young families or retirees, YES we can give \$.50 a day not only to benefit our children but in our own personal interests. Giving back is its own reward.

Kathy Merchant
Lafayette

Editor:

My wife and I have lived in Lafayette for over 20 years. We have raised three sons here and all of our grandchildren are now attending Lafayette schools. When my children attended our Lafayette public schools, the schools were funded by property taxes. As a result of various state legislative changes, now only about 14 cents of every property tax dollar comes back to the School District. I am deeply troubled by the lack of support currently provided by our state for the education of our children.

As a former CEO of an international corporation, I have seen first-hand how critical it is to educate our students so that they may compete in a global society. According to a recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States has fallen from the top of the class to average in the world education rankings. The report, which examines the knowledge of 15 year olds, ranked the United States 14th out of 34 OECD countries for reading skills, 17th for math and 25th for science. According to the report, the United States needs to "make the choices needed to show that they value education more than other areas of national interest." I cannot agree more.

While the state struggles to solve its financial crisis, we need to act locally to support our schools. It is our responsibility to support and educate our children so that they may ensure the future of our country. Please Vote Yes on Measure B.

Most sincerely,
Rick and Janet Cronk
Lafayette

Editor:

How does it feel to be a cheapskate?

According to the US Census Bureau, Californians enjoy the 8th highest per capita income in the US. No surprise there, we've always known that the good life abounds in the Sunshine State, right Unfortunately we are putting the

future of our state in great jeopardy.

California ranks near the bottom in terms of per pupil spending - Education Week ranked us 42nd, behind most of the poorest states in the Union including Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama. And we are dropping fast - in the last 3 years, the Lafayette School District has been forced to cut \$1,100 in annual funding per student.

In case you are wondering, there is a direct correlation between classroom spending, test scores and earning potential.

If passed, Lafayette's Measure "B" will provide emergency funding to preserve core math, science, art, and music curriculums. 100% of Measure "B" funds will be spent on classroom instruction, none on administrative overhead. All for a paltry \$.50/day per Lafayette household.

Please invest in the future - the same way that our parents and grandparents invested in us and vote yes on Measure "B" - or risk being called worse than a cheapskate.

Kevin Cornish

Lafayette

Editor:

While I have strongly supported the Lafayette schools in all prior ballot measures, Measure B will not get my support. Measure B, the May 3 Lafayette special election for a new added parcel tax to support the elementary schools is grossly unfair. First, it categorically exempts seniors with only the check of a box on a form, ignoring the fact that seniors in Lafayette are among the most affluent anywhere. Lafayette seniors statistically have more assets than any other age group in Lafayette. By granting this exemption, potentially 28% of homeowners won't pay the tax - over 1,100 seniors have already opted out of supporting the schools. The tax also treats my parcel, with a small single family home, the same as the parcel that has Safeway on it or the parcel with a 50 unit apartment building on it - even though many or even most of those units will hold families using the schools. All of us, including seniors, commercial property owners and apartment building owners benefit from increased property values in part because of good schools in Lafayette. It's time the Lafayette Elementary School District addressed these gross inequities and came up with a fair funding mechanism. One which will provide stable funding, not repeated ballot measures - the last one was only 3 years ago and raised an existing parcel tax by 235%. Besides, we all know from experience that no tax is really "temporary", as we are told this one is. Vote No on B.

Bill Whiteman

Lafayette

Editor:

As a lifetime "booster" of education, it's distressing to witness an outpouring of support for one more unwarranted local school tax! This, knowing that that advocates of Measure B are applying intense pressure to pass a new parcel tax, just a few years after a previous unjustified one. That one passed, largely because of voter manipulation concocted by a consultant who specializes in applying strategies which prompt voters to react in less-than-logical ways. And, the same consultant is driving strategy for this one.

Sadly, the recent outpouring of "Weekly" letters favoring the measure - all, powerfully stress the "superb quality" of local school efforts...and, need to preserve same, via a new, tax.

Facts are, that "quality" in today's "education context" only represents student abilities to answer test questions based on State-prescribed standards. But, said tests in today's "dumbed-down" education environment, are far from the quality and content of historical US education standards. Numerous studies by respected "education organizations" (American Legislative Exchange Council, American Counsel of Trustees & Alumni, Intercollegiate Studies Institute and others) reveal a multi-generation slide in US (and CA) "education quality, to near 3rd World standards.

Then, there is the CA Teachers Union factor regarding mandated "education costs"...that is, the State dictate of 20 students per teacher. Admittedly, our local district has upped a number of classes beyond that. But, the same agencies who study such matters, have universally demonstrated that the "20 figure" ensures no better results than the 30 or 40 size which has historically obtained in the US (and CA). Exceptions being, special ed situations.

Given class room personnel costs represent a major component of school budgets, simply restoring class size to previous generation numbers, would alone, obviate a tax need.

Finally, given the upscale makeup of our local population, there is also a tendency to equate small public school class sizes, with the quality of private schools. Nothing could be less valid. Agencies that assess such situations, consistently contradict this assessment. Even the increasing growth in Lafayette students now attending both private and non-secular schools, reveal that numbers of parents have become aware of the recent generations of "dumbing-down" America's schools quality.

The forgoing comments represent just a few of many reasons to Vote "No On B" - and, to send the District back to its "bottom-line drawing board" (using the talents of the Board to present credible reasons for seeking added funding - not, employing consult propaganda to manipulate voters!

Donald Lively

Lafayette

Editor:

I am writing to express my continued support for Lafayette Schools, but my strong opposition to the Lafayette School District's (LSD) untimely and ill-conceived consultant-driven parcel tax increase, Measure B, set for a mail in ballot ending May 3rd. My disapproval stems less from the fact that this 10th Lafayette School Tax represents a 46%

annual increase each of the last 11 years (when it was \$84, and now \$508) but that the structure of the tax is grossly unfair.

First, as to the matter of the LSD's claimed "need", and an alleged precipitous drop in State funding putting programs in "crisis", the fact remains that per-student funding ("ADA") has increased steadily from \$5,771 in 2000, to \$9,015 in 2009. (Per Student Revenue Trends, www.Ed-Data.k12.ca.us) Even LSD Superintendent Brill admits that the District does not have a "funding problem" it has "an enrollment problem." Actually, while revenues, teacher compensation, and Administration costs are up every year, LSD has seen its student enrollment drop steadily since 2000, an average of 12%, over ten years. Last reported enrollment numbers for 2010 show another drop. At the same time, the number of teachers has held steady, from 187 in 2000, to 186 in 2010.

The District's parcel tax has grown by leaps and bounds, with other local school taxes, in fact the 4th school tax hike in as many years. On top of school bonds, Measure B would result in a parcel tax that will have increased 285% in just 3 years. LSD parcel tax "J" (levied 2008) raised elementary parcel taxes 235%: starting from \$84 in 1999, then \$132 till 2008, to Measure J's \$313; then 3%/yr. hikes; now \$332 or 252% of the 2008 rate. If passed, Measure B will result in a 508% tax increase since 2000, or a hike of 46% each year over 11 years.

Measure B's "Temporary" \$508 Elementary parcel tax (Measure B adds \$176 more to the current "J" tax at \$332) would be 384% of the 2008 tax. But we all know from experience, that there is no such thing as a temporary tax. They only increase when they are renewed, just as J did.

But the worst thing about Measure B (and Measure J, before it) is that unjustly shifts the tax burden between citizens in unfair and irrational ways. Shaped and promoted by top tax "architect" Larry Tramutola (the so-called "Billion Dollar Man" because he has passed more school and municipal taxes than any non-elected person), Measure B once again buys the reliable senior vote by doling out purely age-based exemptions regardless of need or wealth, and avoids negative campaign funding by keeping commercial parcels, even huge ones like shopping plazas and 50-unit apartment buildings, taxed at the same rate as small single family homes.

While seniors are certainly deserving of our great respect, this age group hardly needs more subsidy in Lamordina. In point of fact, seniors are the wealthiest age group by assets, enjoying the fastest growing incomes in the last 2 years, and the second highest group overall for income level. Fewer than 3% of all Lafayette seniors have income below the poverty level.

Mr. Tramutola knows full well that seniors, like any other fair-minded group, will vote in their best interests (in large numbers), and that would be to pass a tax that exempts them from paying school taxes. This is a problem for working families, especially those stretched thin in more modest homes with large mortgages (many seniors have none) since they are called upon to pay a higher school tax to make up for the 28% of Lafayette homes now occupied by seniors. The LSD reports that 1,108 homes are already senior exempt - a number growing every year -- and seniors are figuring out that they can escape rapidly escalating school taxes by merely checking a box on a form to achieve permanent tax exemption. (To Moraga and Orinda's credit, some of their senior exempt taxes are need-based, not age-based.)

Finally, Mr. Tamutola has a strangle-hold on our school tax measures - a "lock" on the business, if you will. With a prominent School Board Member advocating for successive increases in the Parcel Taxes, she simultaneously holds a voting School Board leadership position, while at the same time serving as a key staff member of Tramutola, LLC, the premiere tax consulting firm, headquartered in Oakland.

Voters should all look carefully at Measure B, and read up and get the facts before they succumb to the slick District campaign and widespread fears about draconian cuts threatening their children's future and well-being. It's high time we let Mr. Tramutola and the LSD School Board know, that enough is enough. Vote NO on Measure B. Read more: www.NoOnB.info.

Lawrence M. Pines
Lafayette

Editor:

My 2.5 year old can't vote yet, but she wants to have all the opportunities for learning open to her that the current children have in their curriculum. If Measure B isn't passed, then she will miss out. I hope that you might publish this 'Yes on B(ee)!' picture of her in the newspaper so that it might persuade some readers that 'our future' needs the opportunities that past students have had.

Many thanks,
Sarah David
Lafayette

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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