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## Letters to the Editor

... continued

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 Council 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

