

## WC-1 a “Gut Check” for Washoe County

October 12, 2016

I suspect we are all glad that election season is almost over. That said, I believe our local election is particularly important in that it really is a “**gut check**” for our community, a term that is used often in the military and in sports. Gut check is defined as “a test or assessment of courage, character, or determination”. In my experience it often speaks to the real character of a person; can they do what they know is right no matter how difficult or unpopular it is. Raising taxes is never easy and is certainly unpopular, but given the current state of our schools can we as a community pass this very important test?

You have heard the push by the community-based coalition that our schools are in desperate need of repairs, that they are unsafe and overcrowded. I don’t believe there is anyone that has walked through our 40 year old (on average) schools that can dispute this. We have the same problem today that we had in 2008, when the community was asked to approve a bond issue for the repair and maintenance of our schools, and again in 2013 when AB-46 failed. The need was real in 2008 and in 2013. Now it is just exacerbated by the decrease in available property tax funding, eight years of neglect and our emerging growth.

You have also heard that the tax is forever, but doesn’t the need for school repair and maintenance go on forever? The only funding our schools get now for infrastructure is from property taxes, taxes that decline as real property is depreciated every year. Nevada is the only state in the nation to do that. And don’t forget the tax cap at 3% which took another big bite out of the available funding for our schools. During the recession property values declined almost 50%, but now that we are on the mend they can only go up a maximum of 3%. With a ten year rolling average that means less than 1% this year from last years depreciated level. We need this sales tax as an enduring compliment to the property taxes that have proven to be unreliable and inadequate.

You may have heard that someone else should pay for this, developers, companies coming to town or even the state. (The state funds operations, the community funds infrastructure.) Slap a \$790M bill on our developers and see what happens to our already high housing costs, and I can assure you that new companies looking to bring their jobs to the region will go somewhere else if we try to extract the repair and maintenance costs of our schools from them up front.

There are many other concerns you may have heard; our school board cannot be trusted with more taxpayer funds, or the school district has plenty of funding, more funds than they need - Really? This is the same type of thinking you hear inside your head when the going gets tough and you’re looking for a reason to stop, a plausible excuse to quit. We’ve all been there - the last mile of a run, the phone call for help in the middle of the night, or an unimaginable loss. You are spent and almost broken, yet you manage to continue on, get it done, and do what you know is right.

As the organization responsible to lead the region’s economic development efforts, EDAWN believes that education is more important now than ever for our economic vitality and economic diversity - not to mention our kids. The environment kids learn in is crucial to their ability to acquire knowledge and ultimately to succeed. So let’s not let one of these many excuses enable

us to quit or fall short of our goal; our responsibility to adequately fund our school infrastructure. We know it is the right thing to do and despite the pain associated with higher taxes (less than \$90 a year for the average family) we have a choice to make. This election will be a test, an evaluation of what is really important to us. WC-1 is our “gut check” as a community.