

Recommendation to County Commission

by Rep. Cox

June 18, 2004

My vote and recommendation to the County Commission is that the Pioneer School District Proposal be placed on the ballot for the approval of the voters. The people as a whole have a right to make this decision. Small groups with vested interests or ulterior motives should not decide the issue.

MORE EFFICIENT IN THE LONG TERM

The Alpine district is not the largest district in the state or nation, though it is 4th largest in the state and among the largest 100 out of 14,000 districts nationwide. Alpine is not a “problem” district as compared to many big city districts. However it is growing fast with over 50,000 students. Many studies have shown that economies of scale are U-shaped. Too small and too large are more expensive.

Nationally, larger districts put a smaller percentage of their revenue directly to the classroom. They have a larger bureaucracy. Some have said they become more of a social agency than an educational agency. In big districts people think the district is the “deep pocket” and can afford another program or funding can be taken from another “richer” side of the district. Consequently, the only way to contain the ever-increasing growth in programs and costs for education is to bring it back to the local community level, where citizens are less likely to pick their neighbor’s pocket for another program. Some have said that “school community councils” bring local control. However this is not the case. They have neither real power nor responsibility. They don’t control budgets, taxes, curriculum, or personnel. They are merely a nice way to get buy-in from the patrons.

The financial study done by BYU students gave the false idea that voting for this division increases taxes. Dividing the district does NOT raise taxes. Taxes would not be raised unless people elected board members that were willing to raise them or by a vote of the people. Even if the study were accurate, it does not change my opinion, because of the value of local control and involvement and what the studies show of the product of smaller districts. However, I do have problems with the value of the study because it did not research what the revenues really would be, so no choices can be made from the study. It did not conclusively establish what the tax base would really be. Nationally, big districts are more expensive. In Utah there is little difference in administrative cost per student between large and smaller districts unless they are smaller than 1000 students. **If charter schools can do it effectively with NO tax base why could we not do it WITH our tax base?**

SMALLER SCHOOLS NEEDED THAN WHAT ALPINE IS PROVIDING

Research says that while all groupings are benefited, numerous studies particularly point to the fact that lower-income areas are the most benefited by having smaller districts. My own studies of Utah test scores included on my website show this to be the case <www.smallerschools.org>.

There is even more research supporting the absolute need to build smaller schools to bring accountability, safety, less violence and crime, academic improvement, parental

involvement, connectedness, and even teacher retention. This is combined with the fact that the most accurate predictor of school size is district size (i.e. the larger the district, the larger the schools). This is proving more and more to be true in Alpine School District. To get enough votes to pass a bond requires the district to build something for everyone. This means larger schools even in the non-growth areas. In similar growth areas in the country, this has eventually led to schools of three to five thousand students. We already have elementary schools of over 1400.

School district average size nationally is about 2500 students. **Pioneer S.D. would be over 8000 students and would be bigger than two-thirds of the districts in Utah.** It would be just smaller than Tooele School District. It would have the challenges of growth, as does Tooele S.D. This can be handled by the use of K-8 or 7-12 grade buildings. These models are being implemented nationwide because they are more economical, closer to the neighborhoods (less transportation costs), have better behavior, test scores, and students even do better in college afterward.

NOW IS THE TIME

Some have said that we need to divide, but that now is not the time. They say wait until we have more tax base or some other reason. Now IS the time. **The window of opportunity is open.** If this proposal fails, I believe **we will not get another chance.** No one will sacrifice all that time and their reputation again. Much as I hate to mention it, once passed it can be reversed. Districts can be consolidated. However, once citizens get a taste of freedom I doubt they will want to give that up.

There is desire nationwide to divide large districts. People have been trying to split Los Angeles and Las Vegas and many other places for years and have not been able to because they are already way too big. **The bigger the district gets, the bigger becomes the political networks and unions determined to fight the split.** While several district divisions have taken place in the last 20 years, they have all been smaller districts that don't have that big network in place to kill the movement. Hence, **the bigger a district is, the harder it is to split it, even though the need is greater.**

There will always be reasons thought up to oppose it by those fearful their jobs would not be needed. Thus, if we understand the governance issue and agree that it is right and needed at some point in time, we need to take the chance when it is given or it won't be offered again. If we wait until some later date to attempt this, the exact same arguments will be made against it from some other side of the district. They will be afraid it will hurt them. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to divide, even though more obviously needed.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE ALREADY DIVIDING THE DISTRICT

The **district is already starting to be split by means of charter schools.** If trust is not regained toward public education by giving the governance back to the people in local communities (the real owners of the schools), these basically single-school school districts will continue to multiply, as will private schools. If the district is not divided into organized community-by-community districts, **it will be done anyway, in a fragmented way;** piece by piece, in a more disjointed fashion that will not serve the citizens as well and **will ultimately cost more than dividing the district.**

Our bodies would not function better as one big cell. **To grow, we must divide.** If our founding fathers had worried about whether it was financially viable to break with Britain, or if they had thought that the timing was not right, we would not be a country today. It could not have happened later. This district division is based on correct principles. It is the right thing for our area. It is the right thing for Utah. **It is right for America, and someone has to be the first.**