



Ponca School Bond Issue Discussion Is Informative and All-American

I came back from giving a short speech to voters at a town hall in Jackson, Neb., the other night all energized. It was great to see 150 people crowd into a gym to fine-tooth comb a \$10 million bond issue proposal for a new secondary school to serve the Ponca Public Schools. That was proportionately a whole heck of a lot more scrutiny and public interest than we ever saw in the \$254 million bond issue of the Omaha Public Schools, and some of those big-ticket ones in District 66 a few years ago.

My friends are opposing the bond issue, saying that a much more affordable solution could be found for the building needs of the district, which has just 400-plus students. They've amassed their arguments for voting "no" and downsizing the project on a website, www.abcscommittee.org

Their consultant, Paul Dorr, an Iowa political consultant that GoBigEd has reported on before with a highly successful track record defeating school tax increase proposals and bond issues, said that only 20% of the square footage of the proposed new building is technically for academics. Much of the rest is a big, honkin' gym. Typically, the big bucks would go for athletics rather than academics. We saw the same thing with the parquet gym floor at Benson High School, and the Olympic-style hoohah for Westside's athletic facilities upgrade.

They asked me to come share my perspective. I really enjoyed the give-and-take. One poignant comment was from an older gentleman in overalls, who said, "Property taxes is the key. We cannot afford this. It will break the community. Taxes have just gone crazy."

The questions were outstanding, the information was thorough, the atmosphere was focused but cordial, and I came away impressed.

Great job, fellow Nebraskans. We'll be looking forward to the results of your Feb. 14 vote.

I'd also like to congratulate *Sioux City Journal* reporter Michele Linck for her excellent account of the meeting, published Wednesday on www.SiouxCityJournal.com. (You can log in and search for the story with "\$9.93 million" or "Jackson Public School" as your key words.) She even spelled my name right. It's so nice to encounter a journalist who can handle a complex story like this. It's great to see all-American journalism just like the all-American town hall.