

Letters

Commissioner questions lack of Stellar support

Editor: Much has been written about the merits of the school referendum. Some of the bullet points are plausible. However, the success or failure of our school system doesn't exist in a vacuum. If raising teachers' pay would automatically solve a dwindling enrollment problem, then it would be an easy call.

But if we put the horse back in front of the cart we should be addressing Brown County's economic solvency. Granted, we are a "bedroom community," but we are also a recreation destination. With music venues, distilleries, bike and hiking trails, zip lines, breweries, art galleries, artisan jewelers, campgrounds, wood workers, metal sculptures and the like, we are a very attractive choice for folks around the Midwest to come and enjoy our counties' assets.

We should be concentrating on developing and expanding that which makes us a tourist and recreational Mecca. That which would be beneficial in that regard are things like finishing Salt Creek Trail, addressing waste water and sewer issues, enhancing connectivity, replacing aging sidewalks and other infrastructure concerns.

All of which would have been addressed with the awarding of the Stellar Grant. This opportunity was effectively killed when Commissioner (Ron) Sanders, supported by candidate Tim Clar, issued their non-support.

A high tide will raise all boats.

One of the classes I remember taking at Leadership Brown County was "conflict resolution." Maybe we all need a refresher course?

Blake Wolpert Commissioner, District 1 Brown County

Husband-wife support school referendum

Editor: While I am aware that Karen's and my being residents of Brown County for only four years causes many long-term locals to view our opinions and "outside" experience with skepticism, but we feel such a strong sense of urgency that the new home community we chose to live in for our retirement is at risk, that we must speak up. Brown County School Corporation (BCS) is exceptionally good – for now.

opportunities that BCS provides with shockingly less resources than other school systems. The early childhood center and Career Resource Center (CRC) are well managed, even with inadequate resources, and they are better than almost every counterpart I have seen.

I feel badly that I assumed otherwise – until I knew better.

We moved here from Noblesville in Hamilton County, where our property taxes were more than three times what we pay in Brown County. Not only BCS, but other taxing entities in Brown County have fallen behind and do not collect enough taxes to maintain, let alone excel in comparison to our neighboring counties. BCS's referendum may not be asking for enough, but school leadership is continuing a pattern of careful thriftiness.

To suggest a 10-cent request is too much or unwarranted is ill-informed. I spent part of my career lobbying on behalf of businesses in Indianapolis, Springfield and Washington, DC.

State legislatures have a special skill in making laws confusing.

The referendum language is not clear. The most important thing to remember is that we must vote "yes" to save the educational, career and lifelong success of children in Brown County, as well as the economic success and quality of life in this wonderful county we are privileged to share. Please remember that we only pay 1-cent more per \$100 of assessed value because our very fiscally responsible, even cautious school administrators and school board have paid off bonds and because the previous 8-year referendum was already at 8-cents. Despite the state's language on the ballot, we are NOT paying an additional 10-cents. We would go from 57.87 cents to 58.45 cents – with Bartholomew County at \$1, Edinburgh at \$1.47 and Beech Grove at \$2.36. The referendum would bring only \$1.88 million per year and is a very conservative ask when considering the school system has recently reduced more than \$1 million in spending, even though many operating costs do not decline with student head count. BCS has lost \$2.26 million in state funding since 2018 due to a loss of 321 students.

We believe BCS's referendum request is not only justified, but cautious and would still leave us at 55% of the state average.

Before living here, we honestly had no idea the quality (SEE **Letters PA GE A5**) and variety of educational

My wife Karen has spent her career in education. She worked in our church preschool, then went on to be a K-5 counselor in Muncie during the time that school system failed and was taken over by state government. Within two weeks more than half the teachers and administrators had left – and certainly the best teachers with the best chance of jobs elsewhere left first. Think what that did to schoolchildren in Muncie. If the BCS referendum fails, Muncie’s experience is one possible path and we do not want that for our children. Karen then worked as a counselor in two Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) middle schools before moving to her current role at Columbus North High School. IPS pay levels are far above those at BCS. IPS teachers have resources BCS could not even dream of. And yet, there are dozens of barriers to learning at IPS, including rampant crime, broken families, poverty, food insecurity, physical and mental abuse and much more that reduce the chance students will learn and succeed in life.

Failing schools and failing communities are interconnected. While BCS, thankfully, does not have some of these barriers to learning that are common in Indianapolis, we do have more than people realize or want to admit.

Working in any school is far more complex, challenging, stressful and exhausting now than historically. Karen’s job as a counselor sometimes includes being a counselor to the stressed adults in the school as much as the children. Teachers and all staff are asked to do much more than in the past and yet we don’t even pay them what they are worth for core teaching, let alone all the extras that are critically important to students’ success in learning and life.

I spent part of my career as a Kroger executive, leading a corporate affairs team that invested millions of dollars a year in local schools here in Indiana and nearby states.

That gave me an opportunity to evaluate hundreds of grant requests and to select the best of the best. I spent a great deal of time in schools of all types across every kind of community, with varying levels of resources and varying teaching models.

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system fails?”

Learn more about what the Referendum means for you and for the schools at: <https://www.browncountyschools.com/referendum-2024/>. Your vote in the May 7th Primary will help determine if this Referendum passes or fails.

The Candidate Meet and Greet employed a new format in an effort to encourage one-on-one interaction between candidates and attendees.

After each candidate had an opportunity to make two-minute introductory remarks, the candidates were stationed at individual tables so that members of the public could ask questions pertinent to each candidate.

There were pros and cons to this approach, but the audience appeared to make maximum use of the time and availability of the candidates and the conversations carried on beyond the scheduled end of the event.

I would first like to thank the community for showing such interest in these important issues. As we all know, our votes can have the biggest impact at the local level. By coming to find out from the members of the community who are running for office or who possess the most information about what is going on, we become better informed in helping to make the decisions critical to keep Brown County thriving.

I would also like to thank Kara Hammes, owner of the Brown County Barnburner, and Alice Lorenz and Pete Bullard with the Historical Society for providing the facilities for these two events. Rick Kelley and Janet Perkins of the Brown County Farm Bureau came through with delicious refreshments to sustain our energy, and the Brown County Library and Historical Society came through with technical equipment.

The League sponsored a zoom forum for the Democrat candidates for US State Representative for District 9 on Saturday, April 6th, from 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Efforts were made to set up a comparable forum for the Republican candidates, but they declined. You can view a recording of this forum by going to the Community Access Television website and looking for

As I compare BCS to other schools, I believe BCS is one of the best I have seen. We don't give BCS enough credit for the very impressive work they do with so little. I also worked with colleges and universities who were struggling to find employees who had been trained with skills matching what employers actually wanted. One of the barriers to college graduates that fit employer needs is high school graduates who learn the right mix of foundational courses. BCS is doing a far better job than most of preparing graduates, whether continuing their education or entering the workforce after high school. If you don't believe me, please go visit a school here in Brown County and inform your own opinion. Be sure to include a stop at best-in-class Eagle Manufacturing and the CRC.

While there are many opinions out there about schools and the referendum that are simply wrong, I can't respond to all of them. The one I do is the silly idea that teachers and school employees don't work as hard as other highlytrained professionals.

Their jobs are more stressful than almost every job in our community. It's not just about how many hours are worked, but how intense and exhausting each hour is. I retired as CEO of Gleaners, the largest social service charity in Indiana, a complex organization with four operating and distribution subsidiaries that together serve about one third of the U.S. I worked hard and came home tired every day. And yet, Karen, as a school employee, has always worked harder than me.

While I've always had jobs with long work days at the workplace and work brought home for evenings and weekends, so has Karen. The assumption that teachers and staff only work when students are in the building is wrong. The assumption that teachers and staff only work on school days is wrong.

Karen is in the school or on-line all summer and every school break, sometimes with two computers running at once. If you do nothing else as you make an informed decision to support BCS students and staff by voting "yes" for the referendum, please remember that the referendum only brings a fraction of the funding for teachers that they deserve in exchange for putting our children on the best possible path in life. Voting "no" deliberately lets students fall behind almost every other school system in Indiana.

Our three children are now adults who benefitted from K-12 public schools and went on to earn undergraduate, master's and PhD's (one finished – one in process). All three still talk of special teachers who gave them extra help in school, inspired them, pushed

the recording. [https:// catstv.net/](https://catstv.net/) or look for the recording on the LWVBC website.

The League continues to encourage everyone to be educated and motivated to participate in exercising your right to vote! Visit Vote411.org to see candidates on your ballot and all the election information you need.

Sunny Leerkamp League of Women Voters for Brown County, Vice President

Confusion over leader's position

To the people of Brown County Indiana: County Government retreated to a new low this past Wednesday 3/20/2024 at the Commissioners meeting.

The Stellar Pathways Program was on the agenda: a regional Economic Development Program. A Letter of Interest needed to be submitted In order for our County to be considered for a \$12,000,000 Stellar Pathways Program award. That letter would have given our County \$50,000 to be used for a study.

This grant, when awarded, has the ability to be used for such projects as finishing Salt Creek Trail (currently going on 20 years of non-completion), helping with waste water issues (reducing the amount of fecal content In our lakes and waterways), fix crumbling sidewalks and also assisting with historic renovation such as needed preservation maintenance on our venerable Court House.

The only requirement to bring this forward was a unanimous vote of the Commissioners to approve a Letter of Intent.

Just saying that we were interested in \$12,000,000 of funding for these projects. Stake holders in favor of supporting this initiative were no less than the Community Foundation, our only municipality-the town of Nashville and most of County government. Everyone spoke in favor of pursuing this amazing opportunity until we heard from commissioner Ron Sanders and his constituent and current candidate for Commissioner Tim Clark.

With no apparent rhyme or reason Commissioner Sanders vote was non supportive, effectively eliminating Brown County from this potential windfall. He wanted another year to review the proposal. We only have weeks to review it, not a year. There is No guarantee that we as a County will ever be afforded this opportunity again.

them and helped them both decide and prepare for their best future paths – reinforcing efforts by Karen and I as parents. We have no children in Brown County schools, and yet we are not just willing, but very eager to pay the BCS referendum taxes – because we know a “yes” vote means Brown County will remain the very special place we chose to enjoy and serve in our retirement – and we could have chosen anywhere in the United States. We also know that a “no” vote means a destructive slide downhill for schools, the community and our shared future. A “no” vote means we will continue to lose families in this county.

Our choice is clear and compelling. Please join Karen and me in voting “yes” on May 7th.

John & Karen Elliott Nashville

Official says thanks, urges participation

To The Citizens of Brown County, Recently as a member of the Brown County League of Women Voters, I was privileged to moderate two community events: a Community Conversation held on March 23rd at the Brown County Barnburner relating to the School Referendum; and a Candidate Meet and Greet on March 27th at the Brown County Historical Society attended by 13 candidates vying for various County, State and US Representative offices. Not many public events have been hosted since COVID, but the response of the community to these two events was remarkable and makes me proud to have moved here and made this home. The events were well attended and participation by the attendees was informed and enthusiastic, while still being civil and respectful.

During the conversation concerning the school referendum, comments were made on both sides of the question. Parties opposed to the referendum emphasized the financial impact for individuals on fixed incomes and that the schools should do more with less. The panel of representatives entertained all questions and invited members of the community to come and visit the schools to see what is being offered.

These individuals showed commitment to their students’ needs and efforts that are being made to prepare every student for a place in the workplace after high school, not just providing a college bound track. There was also an ability for attendees to get assistance computing the impact on their individual property taxes. A big thanks to the panelists – Emily Tracy, BCSD Superintendent, Carol Bowden, President of the BC School Board, School Board members, Amy Oliver and Doug Payne, and Alyson Hanus, teacher at

As it stands today we will not receive the \$50,000 study money and will not be in the running to receive the \$12,000,000.

Huge embarrassment for Commissioner Sanders and Candidate Tim Clark for standing behind him.

Hardly a direction that I feel Brown County needs to go to pursue Economic Growth and Development.

Duane Parsons Concerned resident of Brown County.

Support needed for Stellar Project Grant

Dear Commissioner Sanders, I am reaching out to you as a dedicated public health nurse with over a decade of service in Brown County, where I have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that community initiatives can have on the wellbeing of our residents. I am currently pursuing a Master’s degree to become a Family Nurse Practitioner, aspiring to further contribute to the health and welfare of our community in a more comprehensive capacity.

In addition to my professional commitments, I am also a parent of two teenagers attending Brown County High School. As a resident deeply invested in the future of our community, I am acutely aware of the importance of initiatives that enhance our quality of life and create a nurturing environment for our youth to thrive.

The Stellar Pathways grant presents a critical opportunity for us to secure funding for projects that will not only improve our infrastructure but also enhance the overall health and wellness of our community members. Projects such as upgrading parks and trails, enhancing essential infrastructure, and preserving our historical landmarks are essential steps towards creating a vibrant and sustainable community for current and future generations.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider your vote and support this year’s application for the Stellar Pathways grant. Your positive vote is crucial in ensuring that Brown County can access the resources needed to implement these transformative projects and create a healthier, more prosperous environment for all residents, including our youth at Brown County High School.

Thank you for considering the significant impact this grant could have on our community. Your support in this endeavor would be instrumental in shaping a

Sprunica Elementary – for attending and fielding the thought provoking questions from the audience. One of the most poignant questions asked by a member of the public was seminal to the question voters must answer when considering the referendum – “Do we want to support the schools where the children are our future? Or do we want to become a community that can only support tourists and shop owners if the school

brighter future for Brown County and ensuring a thriving environment for our youth to grow and prosper.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brooke Hertz, RN, BSN Nashville

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