

QUINCY  
**HERALD-WHIG**

Quincy Newspapers, Inc., Publishers

The Herald 1835 The Whig 1838 The Journal 1883

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**OUR OPINION**

## School building plan a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Quincy

VOTERS IN the Quincy School District have an opportunity Nov. 4 to strengthen the long-term future of education and significantly enhance the learning environment for the community's youth by approving a plan to issue \$89 million in bonds for a major building project, and we strongly urge them to do so.

Money from the bonds would enable the district to replace outdated and inefficient elementary schools with five new ones, reorganize attendance boundaries for more conventional K-5 schools, and build an addition and extra classrooms at Quincy Senior High to accommodate ninth-graders now housed at Quincy Junior High.

Importantly, these transformational changes would be accomplished within the next four years without substantially changing the school district's property tax rate.

Moreover, the Quincy School District would avoid spending about \$50 million for life-safety improvements on deteriorating, outmoded buildings that would instead be replaced. It also would save more than \$1 million annually in staffing and facility upkeep costs with fewer elementary schools. And the new, energy-efficient buildings would reduce operational costs by about \$550,000 a year.

Not only would students have a more conducive environment for learning if this plan is approved, but local business leaders say they would find it easier to recruit new employees if they can show Quincy has a modern school system supported by the community.

Therefore, the benefits of this far-reaching proposal, developed through months of study after receiving valuable input from all segments of the community, are overwhelming. Passage is critical for Quincy and future generations to remain competitive in the 21st century.

Simply put, this is an opportunity that should not be lost.

The school district would be able to undertake this vital building project without significantly impacting taxpayers because several outstanding bonds are about to be paid off. This would enable the district to take advantage of historically low interest rates and pay off the \$89 million in bonds and interest over the next 20 years within the district's current tax structure.

The alternative would be to spend about the same amount of tax money to carry out mandated repairs and improvements to existing buildings over the same time period that would offer no significant upgrades. The choice, then, is to continue

to pour money into the upkeep of antiquated buildings that impede learning, or invest in new, modern schools that would serve Quincy children for generations to come.

The answer, we believe, is clear.

School officials last year conducted an extensive review of the district's facilities, which range in age from 42 to 124 years old. It documented that most of Quincy's elementary schools were rated as "borderline" because of various logistical, structural and age-related problems.

Space is so restricted that some schools do not have cafeterias, dedicated libraries or computer labs. Other buildings lack central air conditioning, easily accessible restrooms or adequate accommodations for disabled students. Traffic congestion causes safety concerns for students and adults at many locations. Even simple technological upgrades are difficult or impossible to implement because of the age of the infrastructure of many buildings.

Issuing bonds is the most expedient and financially prudent way for the school district to eliminate those problems, improve the learning environment and boost student achievement.

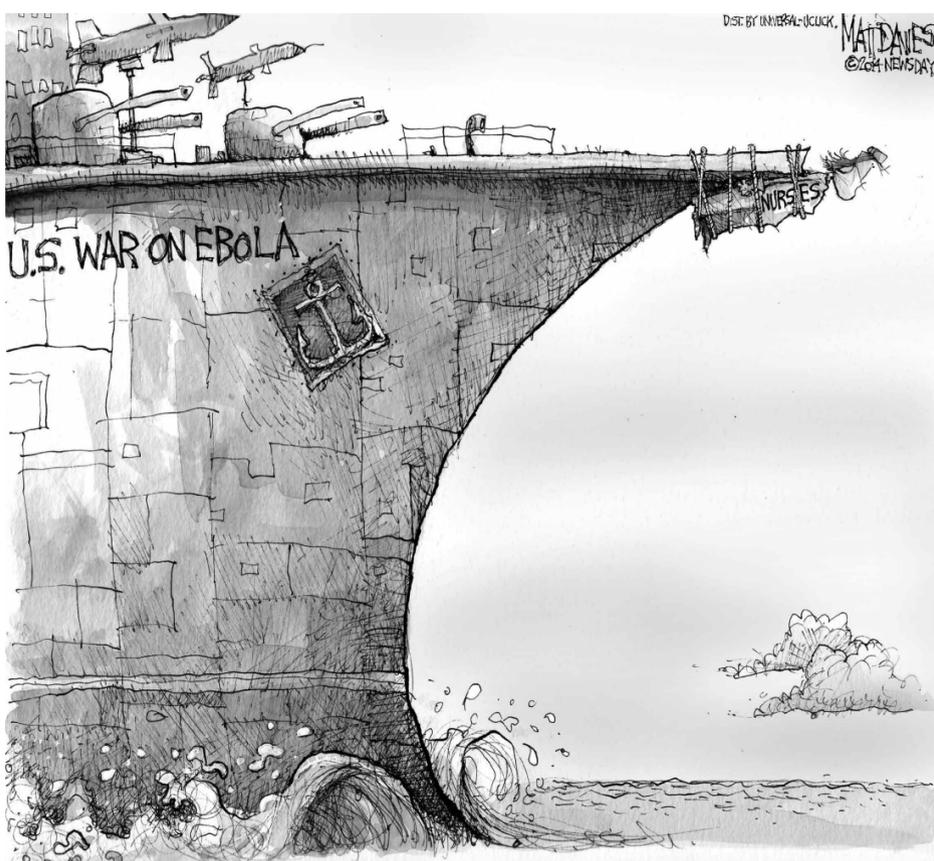
Understandably, the uncertainty of where new schools would be built and what schools students would attend—aside from the Monroe and Baldwin sites, which are known — has caused some apprehension. However, the overriding fact is that no neighborhood would be disproportionately affected by the changes and all students would benefit by being housed in new, modern buildings.

In addition, the reorganization portion of the bond proposal would put grades K-5 in elementary schools, 6-8 at QJHS and 9-12 at QHS. A facilities survey last May showed 78 percent of the respondents wanted such a configuration.

Rarely are voters afforded the chance to approve positive, defining changes like these without a significant increase in taxes.

Clearly, this school building proposal offers what can be described as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Quincians to make a significant investment in the city's education system. Advancing this plan would signal an important commitment to today's youth and to the economic viability of the community for decades to come.

We urge residents of District 172 to send such a message by casting a "yes" vote on Nov. 4 on the Quincy school building bond issue.



**AS THEY SEE IT**

## Union bets on GOP split to derail Rauner

I WASN'T HUGEY surprised when Local 150 of the International Union of Operating Engineers contributed \$30,000 to the Illinois Libertarian Party's candidate for governor, Chad Grimm, earlier this month.

After all, the union's president, Jim Sweeney, was out in front of the push to beat Bruce Rauner during the Republican primary. After a stormy meeting with Rauner, who is running on a pledge to allow local areas to opt-in to "right to work" laws, Sweeney demanded that organized labor stop the candidate in his tracks. The law would give workers the right to not join the very unions that negotiated their pay, benefits and working conditions.

Sweeney's union contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to state Sen. Kirk Dillard's primary campaign and kicked in even more to the Fund for Progress and Jobs PAC, which was the vehicle some unions used to inform Republicans that Rauner was a "closet Democrat."

Dillard just barely lost to Rauner in the primary, but Sweeney didn't let up. When the Illinois Republican Party committed resources this summer to knocking the Libertarians off the November ballot, Sweeney bankrolled a crew that pushed back hard and kept the Libertarians in place.

But as it turns out, that \$30,000 was just a down payment. A whole lot more help from the union is apparently on the way. Sweeney told me that his local is also planning a full direct mail and robocall program for the Libertarian Party candidate.

Asked about rumors that his union would spend between \$200,000 and \$250,000 to push the pro-gun, pro-life Grimm with traditional Republican voters against the much more liberal Rauner,



Sweeney replied, "More." Asked whether the budget was six figures or seven, Sweeney said "Six."

The Libertarian's Grimm is getting about 5 to 8 percent of the vote so far, depending on the poll. He appears to be taking away slightly more votes from Rauner than he is from Gov. Pat Quinn.

The object is to push Grimm's numbers up by informing conservative Republican voters that he's the only pro-gun, pro-life candidate in the contest.

Sweeney explained last week that 42 percent of his members pull Republican ballots during primaries and that many of those members are pro-gun, pro-life conservatives who want another option. But obviously, the real object here is to defeat Rauner.

Rauner says he is pro-choice, and has run TV and newspaper ads in Chicago featuring women attesting to his pro-choice convictions. The National Rifle Association has refused to rate Rauner, claiming he won't answer its questions. Rauner's positions can't be used by Gov. Quinn, who is solidly pro-choice and not exactly a gun lover, but Sweeney can sure use them.

Sweeney said his union local had a 50 percent unemployment rate during the depths of the Great Recession. Once proud, solidly middle-class union members were

relying on union-sponsored food banks. Several lost their homes, their cars, their families.

The unemployment rate for Sweeney's members is now the second-lowest in the country in that sector, thanks in no small part to a big public works program pushed by Gov. Quinn. Sweeney's local endorsed Quinn four years ago over Bill Brady because Brady, like Rauner, favored "right to work" legislation.

Sweeney said he met with Rauner twice since the primary to find common ground, but Rauner refused both times to come off his "right to work" stance and wouldn't commit to a funding source for a new public infrastructure program.

And Sweeney doesn't appear to be in the mood for any further discussions, telling me that even if Rauner publicly changed his position on "right to work," as he has with the minimum wage increase issue and taxes, the union leader wouldn't believe him.

A huge factor in Gov. Quinn's win four years ago was independent candidate Scott Lee Cohen's millions of dollars worth of TV ads. He ended up splitting the anti-Quinn vote with Bill Brady. The hope here is that Grimm can manage a repeat performance.

The universe Sweeney's aiming at is probably pretty small. Partisanship is strong on both ends of the spectrum, and persuading people to "throw away" their vote on a third-party candidate won't be easy, to say the least.

But for those who sincerely believe that abortion is murder and who refuse to support any candidate who disagrees with them, it could be a powerful message. The same goes for the "true believers" who own guns.

And in a close race — and this race is close — every vote will count.

### Election letters deadline set for noon Tuesday, Oct. 28

The Herald-Whig welcomes letters about the Nov. 4 elections in Illinois and Missouri. All letters about the Nov. 4 elections must be received by noon on Tuesday, Oct. 28.

Guidelines for letter writers are:

- Letters should be no more than 400 words long.
- Letters must be signed and include

the writer's address and telephone number for purposes of verification.

Letters may be sent to:

- By mail: The Quincy Herald-Whig, 130 S. Fifth, Quincy, Ill. 62301
- By email: letters@whig.com
- By fax: 217-221-3395