



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2019 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry?

School bond issue caught up in controversy

Date(s) of publication?

Is it racist to vote against school bond issue? No, but it would be short-sighted

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Here are some of the questions about school bond issue, but in the end it's rather simple: Yes vote is good for Cape

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

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Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This

space will expand as you type in your comments.)

Schools are at the center of life in small-town America. In Cape Girardeau, Mo., a school bond issue became controversial when the city and school system devised a plan to build a new aquatic center in a high-poverty, largely black neighborhood. Emotions began to rise among various factions. Publisher Jon Rust's column – "Is it racist to vote to against school bond issue? No, but it would be short-sighted" – was identified as a turning point in the debate, lessening the acrimony. Initially well behind in polling, the ballot issue subsequently passed, with 61 percent of the vote. Rust's straightforward columns were cited as not only important to the bond's passage, but for keeping people on the moral high ground, no matter their position.

OPINION

TODAY'S PRAYER

O Father God, we marvel at your creation and give you honor and praise. Amen.

LETTER

Time we cross the aisle

If the absence of the heartbeat is going to be the point we pronounce that life has ended, then why is the presence of a heartbeat not the point that we declare that life has begun? If you're going to hold to the belief that life does not begin until you're born, then why not hold to the belief that it doesn't end until you're buried.

Think about that. As it is, you can get away with killing babies that have a heartbeat but have not yet been born. If you play that logic out to the other end, why couldn't you get away with killing people that have a heartbeat but have not yet been buried?

I am sickened by our Democrat lawmakers as they proclaim their concern for the innocent lives that are lost to guns, while at the same time they put in overtime fighting for the legalization of killing more and more truly innocent babies.

Surely many Democrats are as sick of their party's actions as we Republicans. It's time "We the People" cross the aisle to put a stop to this lunacy. We have been conditioned to believe that elections are the only time that our voices count. But, can you imagine if all across the U.S. we, from both sides, would start showing up on the office steps of our representatives to let them know we are appalled at what they are trying to do?

MIKE JONES, *Cape Girardeau*



POLL QUESTIONS

Do you support state tax credits as a mechanism to bring more film and TV production to the state?

Should Congress vote against President Trump's national emergency declaration for wall funding?

See results on the Perspective page Sunday.

AOC model leaves no room for moderates



MIKE JENSEN

When Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez first debuted on the national stage, she was an oddity winning an upset victory over a longtime Democratic incumbent in one of the smallest turnout elections in House history.

She quickly became the face of a new breed of Democrats with an array of radical ideas that, not too long ago, would have made her a laughingstock.

But anti-conservative hysteria among the leftist Democrats pushed Ocasio-Cortez into the national spotlight.

This past weekend she railed against capitalism as "irredeemable" and said America was "garbage" because of income inequality.

She famously was the architect of the Green New Deal which would reshape the nation with radical regulations, massive overspending and virtual total taxation to pay for her misguided and misinformed vision.

She is no longer an oddity. She is dangerous.

Like the once-darling Barack Obama, she offered a fresh new face for a party desperately trying to find footing in the era of Donald Trump.

Her sophomoric understanding of basic economics should be a non-starter. Yet she attracts a massive following from her clearly uninformed lemmings.

She recently reached way back to blame former President Ronald Reagan for creating racial division while ignoring the countless race baiters within her own party ranks.

In short, she has become Barack Obama without the intellect.

In an informed society, Ocasio-Cortez would fade away as quickly as she came under the spotlight.

But therein lies the problem.

We are either misinformed as a society or under-informed. The national media has orchestrated a concerted and organized propaganda machine to run interference for the progressive left.

And in doing so, they have put this nation on the brink of anarchy.

Ocasio-Cortez is an empty vessel protected from criticism by a willing national media. Her followers are superficial and her ideas unworkable.

And yet she is the natural result of a simplistic society that gives credibility to the latest shining object to gain media attention.

While America was founded on the concept of equal opportunities for all, Ocasio-Cortez advocates for equal outcomes for all.

She favors an ultra big government approach where all share equally in the bounties of this nation without regard to effort or sacrifice.

Ocasio-Cortez is a media creation crafted to appeal to an intellectually deficient population.

The rapidly dwindling moderates within the Democratic party are cowards to question her rantings and the national media defends the indefensible.

If the Democrats continue to follow the Ocasio-Cortez model into the 2020 election cycle, the result may well be the obituary for the Democratic party as we once knew it.

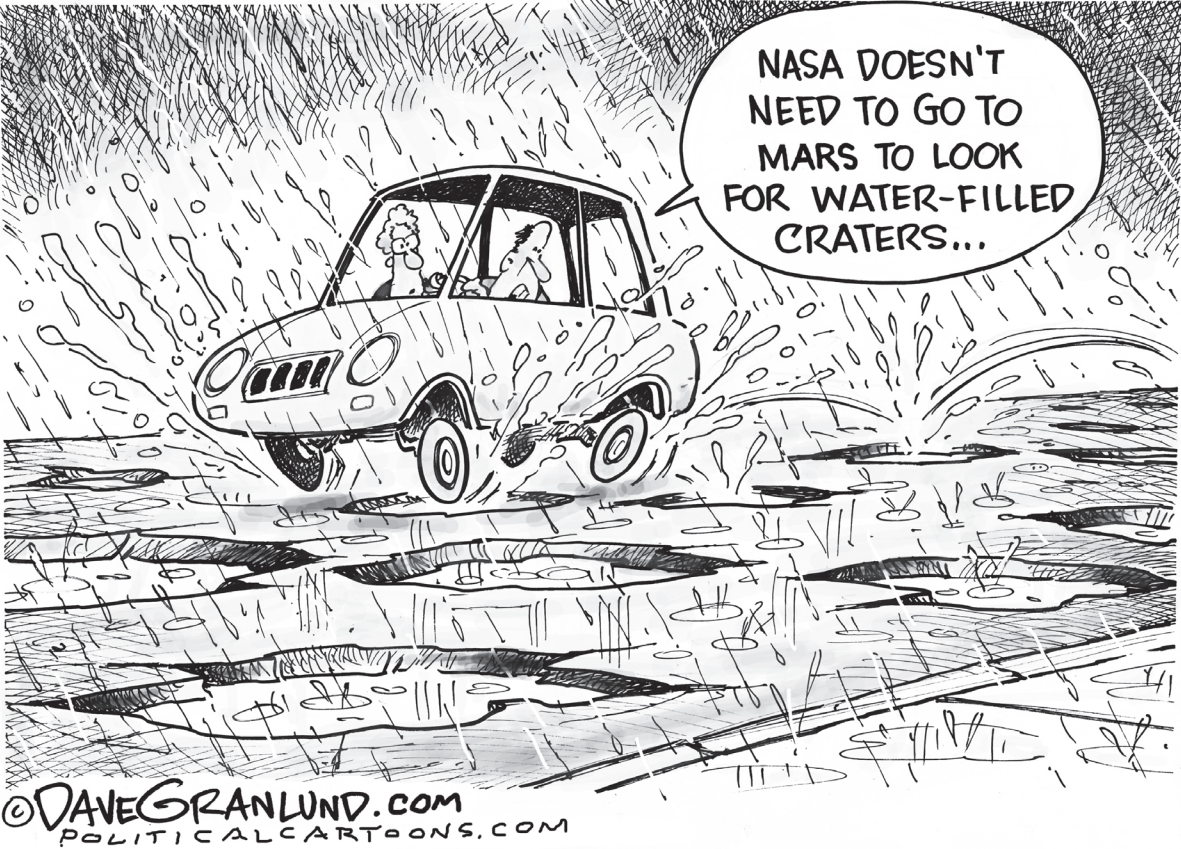
Michael Jensen is the publisher of the Standard Democrat in Sikeston, Missouri.

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BOARD COLUMN

Is it racist to vote against school bond issue? No, but it would be short-sighted



JON K. RUST

So many problems in today's world sadly emerge because folks on opposite sides of an argument try to eliminate opposition through character destruction. Disagreement, it is stated (or implied), results because of one side's moral failure, not because of legitimate differences of opinion.

I bring this up because some well-meaning and good people in Cape Girardeau are creating an undercurrent that if the upcoming school bond issue fails, it would be for racist reasons. This is a dangerous, dangerous belief, more likely to ignite future problems than to solve them. And it is wrong. There are many reasons the school bond issue might fail — besides a general dislike of taxes — and almost all have to do with the uncertain process surrounding a new aquatic center. More about this later.

Here is my big point: It would not be racist to vote against the school bond issue, but it would be, I strongly believe, shortsighted.

And, it would be to the detriment of the city — present and future.

Voting for and passing the school bond issue would be good for Cape Girardeau, potentially even transformative.

But let's unpack some of the tensions around this matter, starting with some areas of common agreement. For one, without the aquatic center, the strong odds are the school bond issue passes. It is part three of a three-part master plan to improve and renovate local schools. Phase one, a \$40 million plan to replace an elementary school, build an event complex and address deferred maintenance, passed with 61 percent of the vote. Phase two, a \$20 million plan to renovate several schools and increase security, along with larger projects at Central Junior High School and the Cape Career and Technology Center, passed with an even higher 71 percent of the vote.

This third phase, which does not require a new tax, is much less than the first two at \$12 million, and it comes on the heels of the school district doing all that it promised in the first two phases. It also comes with great momentum and much good taking place in the school system from significantly improved high school graduation rates and national academic recognitions to the launch of innovative and extremely successful leadership programs such as the Honorable Young Men's Club, Tiger Lillies and Air Force JROTC.

Moreover, the school plan is solid. Alma Schrader and Jefferson schools desperately need updates. Roofs, parking lots and mechanical systems (air conditioning and heat) at these buildings and elsewhere don't simply fix themselves. Meanwhile, there is a long line for pre-kindergarten spots in the Cape schools. A new Early Childhood Development Center would double the capacity. It, too, is needed.

As I said, odds are, with the recent history of community support for school bond issues in this area, the vote would likely pass.

What's ginned up the controver-



I believe there are good people involved in these deliberations. Superintendent Glass and his team are visionary professionals, who have the best long-term interests of the school district in mind. The city is appropriately squeamish about committing to building an aquatic center it can't afford in the long-term. Both want to do the best for the community and are willing to take the time to attract more funding. Locating at Jefferson might open up more funding, and it offers an added bonus, elevating a region that would elevate the whole city."

is the aquatic center. Citizens overwhelmingly (by 81 percent of the vote) supported the city parks and recreation department's sales tax extension in 2018 with the belief a new aquatic center would "replace the Central pool," even if the city's plan allocated only a fraction of what such a pool would cost. Many voters envisioned a 50-meter pool similar to the current one, but indoors. The city changed its original marketing materials and was clear the type and size of pool ultimately built would depend on financial partners, but proponents (especially competitive swimming families) held tight to a gleaming, competitive arena.

The location at the time of the vote was also left uncertain. But many in the community began to think about different locations, including next to the Sportsplex. People dreamt big. But in the end, only the Cape Girardeau school district, which has partnered with the city on the current pool for more than 40 years, stepped forth with a realistic commitment. And the district believed strongly if it were going to invest money into both building the center and contributing to operating costs, it needed to be part of one of its facilities.

Let me share my direct perspective. Citizens should beware the high operating costs of a massive swim center. Unlike the Sportsplex, which can be re-purposed for multiple sports and events — from pickle ball tournaments to soccer, basketball, volleyball, cheerleading, corn hole and other competitions — a swimming pool can be used only for water sports. And there are only so many swimming competitions per year to drive revenue. Meanwhile, the more and deeper the water, the higher the operating costs. The most onerous cost of an aquatic center is not the original construction, it's the annual cost of operating it over 40 or more years. Thus, seeking partners was a valid way for the city to proceed. In hindsight, though, it would have been smarter to align partners in advance of the city vote rather than afterward.

The lack of money and questions

about the type of pool, however, created disunity in the public as the city finalized discussions with the school district. While some believed that a 35-meter pool was enough to serve the needs of competitive swimmers, others would not be satisfied for less than the current Central 50 meters.

None of this has to do with race.

Where race emerged is when the school district led by Neil Glass saw a purpose for the pool, which wasn't part of the city's original message. A pool near Jefferson School, which has a predominantly minority population, could be transformative not only to that area of town, but to the community as a whole, it was said.

Again, let me be direct. Near Jefferson School is not a bad location. In fact, it's a great location, especially with an entrance and high visibility to the space off Shawnee Parkway. Already, thousands of families travel there each year to participate in events at the Shawnee sports complex. And it fits the requirement for not buying land (it's already owned by the city and district) and limiting ongoing operating costs (being attached to a facility already staffed).

To me, if locating the aquatic center at Jefferson also helps transform that part of the city, an area with one of the highest concentrations of poverty in the state, then that's a major bonus. But here's another bonus. Because of this location, more funding might be available through federal and private grants, which are earmarked for blighted areas. Thus, the best chance for the best facility is actually at Jefferson. Accordingly, if the school bond issue passes, the city and school district have put the brakes on finalizing a design and issuing bonds. Instead, they've committed to reaching out and exhausting opportunities.

That message puts them in a predicament, though. Again, citizens will be voting on something uncertain, and it doesn't help that parks and recreation boosters, with all their fans, haven't been clear in their support.

I know my following argument will fall on many deaf ears, but I believe there are good people involved in these deliberations. Superintendent Glass and his team are visionary professionals, who have the best long-term interests of the school district in mind. The city is appropriately squeamish about committing to building an aquatic center it can't afford in the long-term. Both want to do the best for the community and are willing to take the time to attract more funding. Locating at Jefferson might open up more funding, and it offers an added bonus, elevating a region that would elevate the whole city.

Does any of this controversy have anything to do with race? Not really. Hopefully, you will learn more in the next several weeks. The vote is on April 2. And, oh yeah, it will take 57 percent of the vote to pass. In a recent unscientific Southeast Missourian online poll, it lost 56 percent against to 35 in favor with 9 percent undecided. Your support will be needed.

Jon K. Rust is publisher of the Southeast Missourian.

OPINION

TODAY’S PRAYER

O Lord Jesus, thank you that your great love for us endures forever. Amen.

SPEAK OUT

Use tax

To replay to another comment, the round-about in Jackson was worth every penny spent. That project greatly improved traffic flow through the area. In addition, the bathroom was a much-needed improvement to the baseball diamonds in the park. Some of us want a nice, well-maintained city to live in. A city use tax is a means to get there. Others want to be greedy and live in a run down city with pothole-filled streets.

The Y affiliation

A YMCA affiliation is a bad idea. YMCAs bring their own set of directorship, staffing and programs. These would all be in direct conflict with an already-established parks and recreation department and their commitment to staffing and programs. While the city and school district tout their

long-running relationship, what about the relationship between the city and its own parks and rec team? Why would we even consider “donating” \$10 million of taxpayer money to this endeavor? Not what voters envisioned last April!

Rust column

Jon Rust went to great lengths to advocate for Cape Public Schools using taxpayer money to build a swimming pool near Jefferson school. What he didn’t do was explain why the River Campus and Shawnee Sports Complex didn’t “fix” any of the neighborhood problems. He didn’t explain why a school district struggling to graduate only 87 percent of its students needed to be spending millions on a pool. Mr. Rust has a platform, and I encourage him to more thoughtfully approach this matter.

POLL QUESTIONS

Would you support an effort in Missouri to ban texting while operating a vehicle?

Do you plan to vote in local elections on Tuesday, April 2?

See results on the Perspective page Sunday.

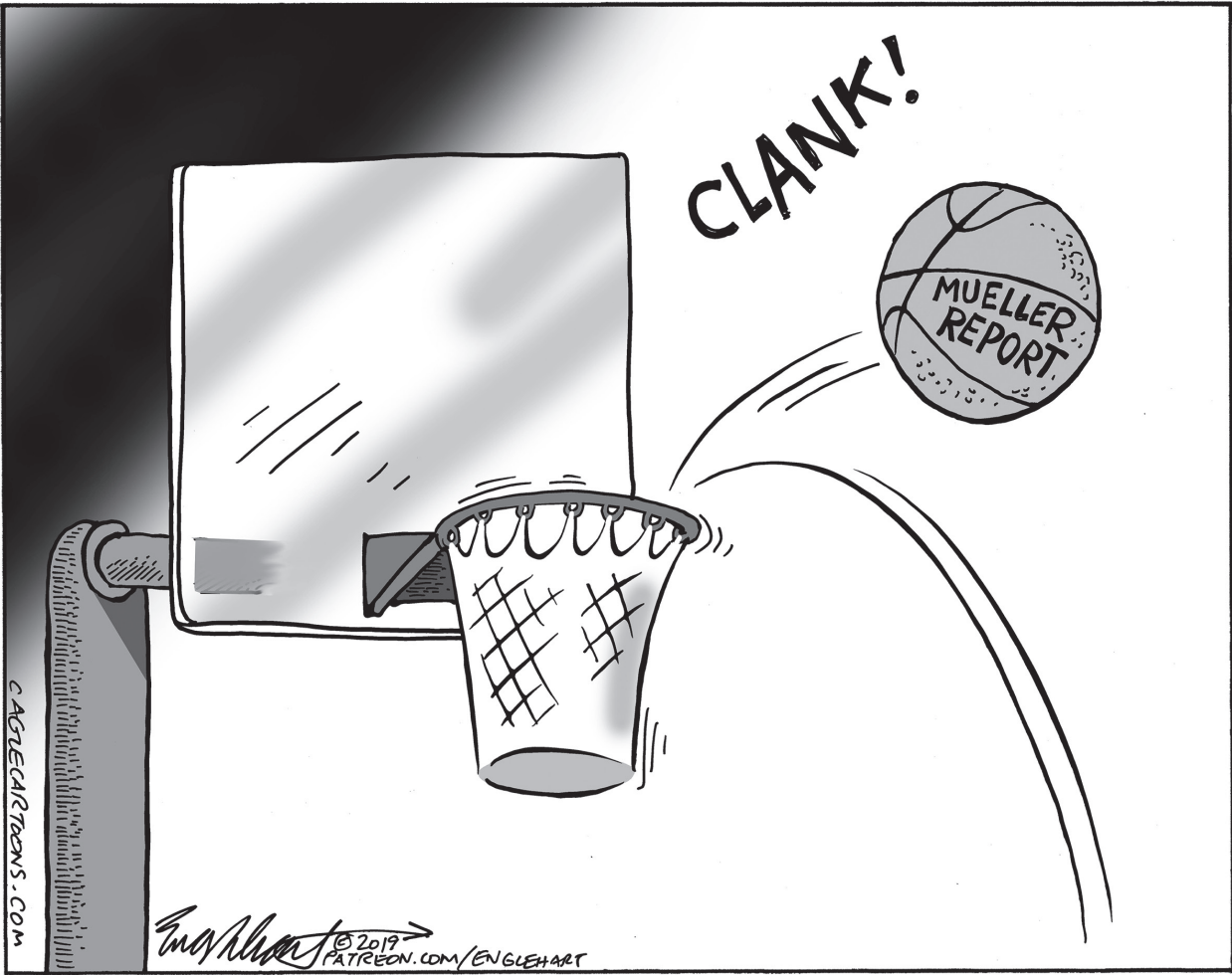
Despite Mueller report Democrats push investigation agenda



MIKE JENSEN

As a pundit once wisely said, “It’s not over till it’s over.” Or, “It’s not over ‘til the fat lady sings.” Or as the Democratic Party says, “It’s not over ‘til we say it’s over.” And thus, we conclude the two-year, multi-million dollar investigation into Presidential wrongdoing and launch yet another lengthy probe designed to reap discontent until November 2020. If you want to watch utter desperation, look into the eyes of the Democratic leaders as they scurry in search of a crime. Were it not dangerous, it would be comical. Others, much more informed and much more skilled than I, will opine on the result of the Special Counsel’s investigation for weeks to come. But for those of us who hoped the report would put an end to this partisan battle, think again. The game plan of the Democratic Party is so very obvious. Aided by a runaway national media, the Democrats will continue to sow the seeds of scandal until Election Day 2020. The Democrats care little about truth. Their aim is to push an agenda designed to shroud the White House as criminal and, in doing so, find some advantage in an election that will determine the direction of America for decades to come. And while we’re passing out blame, let’s look beyond the prejudiced media and beyond the wild-eyed radical Democrats and put blame on the cowardly Republicans who simply want to play nice. It’s time that the GOP unites and starts calling out the partisan hacks who spew their venom on CNN and MSNBC. Take off the kiddie gloves and adopt the Obama model — get in their face. And while we’re at it, where are the consequences for the partisan and illegal actions of those players in the FBI and the Justice Department who engineered this Mueller probe? When will these arrogant bureaucrats who plotted a soft coup be brought to justice? All Americans have waited anxiously for the Mueller investigation hoping beyond hope that, regardless of the conclusions, it would mark the end of this turmoil. We should have known better. When Uncle Joe Biden and the always popular Democrat socialist Bernie Sanders are the hope of the Democratic Party, you begin to see just how shallow and thin their bench truly is. So with little enthusiasm for the hoard of Democratic hopefuls, the sole road to victory in 2020 is to uncover some mysterious plot within the Trump administration that will tip the scales in their direction. They pinned their hopes on Robert Mueller. Since that flopped, the Dems will now turn the page and point toward some yet-to-be-discovered wrongdoing. And when that fails, there will be more. What’s that definition of insanity? Trying the same thing again and again and expecting a different result. And that sadly is today’s Democratic Party. But leave it to the Russians to have the best reaction to the Mueller report outcome. “It’s hard to find a black cat in a dark room, especially if it isn’t there.” I couldn’t say it better.

Michael Jensen is the publisher of the Standard Democrat in Sikeston, Missouri.



BOARD COLUMN

Here are some of the questions about school bond issue, but in the end it’s rather simple: Yes vote is good for Cape



JON K. RUST

My email inbox has become a destination for arguments against the upcoming school bond issue. Other people button-hole me around Cape. I’m not a spokesperson for the bond effort, but I am an interested observer, a citizen of Cape Girardeau who wants to see our community thrive. Let me address a few of the concerns shared with me — and some answers: 1. The recent announcement from two former mayors about a potential \$1.5 million anonymous donation to enhance what’s possible with the aquatic center is just “buying the election.” My answer: If you’re against the school bond issue, and see it as something to defeat, I understand if you don’t like that someone is wanting to donate to the project, especially if you fear that it may persuade some undecideds to vote in favor. But to me, as long as this isn’t some sort of bait-and-switch offer, the information about a donor willing to step up with a major gift is important to the deliberation. Former mayors Jay Knudtson and Harry Rediger have staked their reputations on delivering the donation, and I understand a contract is in place outlining the matching process. Although I’m not at liberty to say (I was told off-the-record), I also know the donor, who is a big believer in local development and the local school system. And, no, this person doesn’t have a direct interest in the location other than believing the project is important for the long-term strength of the city and its citizens. The fact the donor is anonymous mucks up the transparency and puts another uncertainty into this whole process, which has been rife with them. But the money is real. And it underlines the Jefferson location brings financial support not available at another location — whether it is from private donors or from state and federal government. Would it be better if the donor were not anonymous? Yes. But I also understand the reasons for privacy. The main thing is he’s real and committed. 2. More money to build a bigger aquatic center just leads to more future financial risk, due to the high operating costs of swimming pools, the larger the more expensive. My answer: City and school officials are intensely aware whatever facility is built must have a clear operating plan — with sufficient revenues and controlled costs. Neither wants to create an unsustainable situation. Meanwhile, for those who yearn for the best pool possible, the Jefferson location is your opportunity. The city and school district are committed to holding off on final plans until they determine what other funding is available — and what is sustainable.

3. The structure of the matching donation doesn’t make sense. It’s unlikely the money will ever be received. My answer: The donor has offered \$1 million if others (not restricted to private individuals) raise \$2 million. Then, the donor has committed another \$500,000 for the next \$500,000 raised. All together, this represents a possible \$4 million. Is this amount likely? Because it’s not limited to private donations, I think so. The school district and city have committed to exploring available grant funds, and other potential private donors are being approached. As fundraising professionals will tell you, getting that first big commitment is an important step. Having a \$1.5 million commitment in hand helps the process immensely. Is additional money guaranteed? No. But many people, including the anonymous donor, are aligned in wanting a swimming facility in south Cape to succeed, because they believe it is important for the town. There’s something noble about that. 4. Jefferson is difficult to get to. My Answer: I addressed this concern in the online comments area of a previous column, but the Jefferson location would be visible and accessible directly from Shawnee Parkway — across the road from the Shawnee sports complex main entrance — which is already traveled by thousands of area and out-of-town soccer and softball families. Meanwhile, the Jefferson/Shawnee Parkway location offers nice accessibility to Central High School and Central Junior High School, and it’s a direct shot to and from the interstate. The parkway is also among the fastest, safest ways to navigate through Cape Girardeau. For example, according to Google maps, the drive from Central High School to the Shawnee entrance (which is my proxy for the aquatic center entrance) is 2.5 miles and 5 minutes. Meanwhile, the drive from Central to the Sportsplex is 14 minutes (7.1 miles) via Mount Auburn Road or 9 minutes (6.2 miles) via the highway. I’m using the Sportsplex location as an example, because I know many people have seen that as a preferred location. The point is that the Jefferson location is a very good one, purely on visibility and access. 5. But it’s ridiculous to think a hotel and restaurants will be developed next to Jefferson School — economic revitalization is unlikely to follow like people suggest. My answer: I don’t know who is suggesting that the Shawnee Parkway area is going to be transformed into what’s anticipated at Center Junction. I think people may be confusing “transforming” the neighborhood and city — crime rates, student success, lifting up a previously underperforming school to a STREAM-initiative local leader — with a mercantile perspective that “transformation” has to do

mainly with new businesses. In this case, the transformation is about people and, in an economic sense, future students, workers and citizens, which can create less drain on city services and lead to more high achievers, which benefit us all. 6. This whole process has been a mess. We keep being asked to vote on uncertainties. What’s the operating agreement between the city and school district going to look like? Who will own the building? Operating an indoor facility is much more complicated than the current bubble, are they ready for that? Wouldn’t it be better to just vote no and have them start over? My answer: You’re right that this has been a convoluted process. In a large way, the school district has been put in a difficult position. In the parks and rec vote, the city basically sold “hope and change”: no specifics (from location of a new pool to its ultimate size), allowing people to dream. The school district is now bearing the brunt of sharing details, including a specific location. And yet, we’re right back to not knowing ultimate size of pool or total amenities. Our city and school officials are basically asking us to trust them to balance the complexities of construction and operating costs with revenue opportunities and swimming and competitive amenities — tied in with neighborhood redevelopment and unknown donors. But here’s the stress reliever: On the big things, both entities have a solid track record. The school district delivered well on the first two phases of its master plan, and instructional momentum across the system is excellent. The city has had success in managing big projects such as the new water treatment plant, Cape Splash, the Sportsplex and others. Are there areas where municipal officials fall short? Yes. But in the big projects, once they’ve identified partners and budgets, they’ve come through, in part by hiring experts to figure out the details. On top of recent success, for 40 years now the city and school district have been good partners in co-owning and operating the bubble at Central Junior High School. Will an indoor aquatic facility bring more complexity? Yes, but they will have the benefit of a long history of working together in addressing any new challenges. Neither will want to fail. The vote is coming up fast. The aquatic center is only a portion of the overall plan, which makes many needed improvements to city schools. I hope you continue to learn and think about it. Your vote will be important. Voting no would certainly send a message to city leaders, but it would come at a high cost to local schools, disrupting positive momentum.

Jon K. Rust is publisher of the Southeast Missourian.

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