



**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

**Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation?**

Under 50,000

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

## SPEAK OUT

### Use tax

To replay to another comment, the roundabout 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.

**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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