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As I See It: The case for the Democratic slate for Radnor School Board

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By Susan Stern

Most people who know me, even a little bit, know that I care deeply about the education of children. Not just my own children but all children. I can be quite vocal and passionate about it, in fact, as most Radnor School District administrators and all Radnor School Board directors know me from my involvement at board and committee meetings. I was a school-board candidate in 2007 because the issues and challenges of education compelled me to run.

On Nov. 3 there will be a Radnor School Board election and I hope you will take the time to vote. I hope you will vote because this election, more than any previous school-board election, will truly shape the future of education in Radnor.

So why vote in this election? This is the first election to take place since the full impact of Act 1 regulations has laid its heavy hand on the Radnor School District budget. Act 1 was enacted to slow down rising real-estate taxes, the major source of funding for school districts throughout Pennsylvania. The state now limits how much a district may raise taxes, without referendum, to meet the cost of educating children. There is a long, complicated formula that is tied to inflation but the point is school-board directors are no longer free to just spend, spend, spend and raise your taxes to pay for it.

Spend, spend, spend has certainly felt like the trend to me since moving to Radnor nine years ago. The Capital Fund has been virtually depleted; the debt has grown to over \$100 million for buildings and state-of-the-art playing fields, and we currently pay over \$7 million per year for debt service. That's almost 10 percent of the entire \$74-million budget, in interest payments, and without Act 1 there was no end in sight to the careless spending. The attitude seemed to be, "this is Radnor so we have to have the best" regardless of whether we can "afford" it.

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Radnor is not alone in its struggles to create a budget within the Act 1 guidelines but, because we receive virtually no federal funding, our district is facing extraordinary financial challenges in the coming years. The School Board is facing a \$3.5-million deficit in the 2010-2011 school year and I fear the cuts will impact the quality of the educational experience in Radnor.

So why vote in this election? Right now we have four highly qualified candidates running for School Board and I ask you to take the time to vote for them. Rob Armstrong, Doug Blazey, Lydia Solomon and Brucie Rapoport share a common set of values that we need for our district. They each believe that the education of children comes first and foremost. They should believe it: every one of them currently has children in the district. Their children are directly affected by this new "Act 1 Budget Era." I can't help but wonder how candidates who don't have "skin in the game," i.e., their own children in our schools, can be as connected to the educational needs of Radnor children.

In the coming months the board will begin negotiations for the next teacher contract. I remember almost four years ago we were on the brink of a strike because the Republican-led board abdicated its responsibility to negotiate the contract to a lawyer who took an adversarial attitude toward the teachers. I want a board that is committed to negotiations with shared interests and shared responsibility at the table. Rob, Lydia, Doug and Brucie are the leaders I want at that table. They are good listeners, fair-minded, intelligent, financially savvy and collaborative in their approach to the task at hand.

Rob, Doug, Lydia and Brucie believe that an open, honest line of communication between the board and the public would best serve all residents of Radnor: taxpayers, parents and students. They support televising committee meetings, expanding our understanding of the board's decision-making process. They believe that working together in a collaborative, open board would bring the best ideas forward to meet the challenges our district faces. They believe in accountability and responsibility and are willing to ask it of the administrators, the employees and of themselves.

I ask you to vote for them because I trust them. There is so much at stake in this year's election. It is important to vote for candidates with knowledge of the schools and who have specific solutions to achieve fiscal discipline and to preserve the quality of a Radnor education. All of us in Radnor have a stake in the quality of our schools. It is worth your time to vote on Nov. 3. I ask you to choose all four Democratic School Board candidates: Rob Armstrong, Doug Blazey, Lydia Solomon and Brucie Rapoport. Their leadership as a team would bring a thoughtful and productive mindset to the conduct of School Board business, which would help us meet the many fiscal challenges we will face in the coming years. This election does matter for the future of Radnor schools, our community and our children. Please vote.

Susan Stern lives in Radnor Township.

Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of mainlinemedianews.com.

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