

Remarks to Board of Education, Community Unit School District 200, May 9, 2007

My name is Mark Stern and I live at 1115 South Gables in Wheaton. Americans bet \$118 million on last week's Kentucky Derby.¹ Tonight, this board wants to bet \$19 million on passing a referendum. That's no sure thing – just ask Glen Ellyn District 41. Don't gamble millions on passing a referendum that's not even on the ballot yet. Don't risk what you can't afford to lose. Don't spend first and ask permission later. Residents will support a fair vote with full disclosure, but will vote no if they feel they are being railroaded.

Just last year the board told the community that architectural design and engineering services would begin only upon passage of a referendum. It said that \$66,000 would cover all needed pre-referendum design services just like the high schools.² It also claimed that the entire building cost, including all fees and furnishings, would be \$35 million plus land.³

Now the board wants to break its word and ante up \$19 million. It claims this will save money – yet even after the “savings,” costs are nearly \$12 million more than what we were told last May.⁴ Delay also affects Jefferson renovation costs – what's being done about that?

The board also claims that its wager is not at risk because we could use the middle school drawings to build “somewhere else” if a referendum failed. First, with no referendum, there will be no money for the district to pay its marker. Instead, we would have to slash maintenance at every school by 20%.⁵ Second, what other site is available? The architects confirm these plans are unusable on the current Hubble site unless it were vacant.⁶ We wouldn't have another school to use in the meanwhile if we vacated Hubble. So the district is bluffing if it claims these plans are usable elsewhere, unless the board has a hot tip on some undisclosed site. Even then, a referendum would be needed first.

Paying building costs without a referendum may also violate Illinois law requiring voter approval for new school buildings, risking a lawsuit.

¹ Source: www.kentuckyderby.com.

² Board Minutes, May 24, 2006, available on district web site.

³ District 200 Breaking News, “Negotiations to Begin for New School Site,” May 2006, www.cusd200.org.

⁴ “Myth vs. Fact,” District 200, April 2007, showing increase of \$11.8 million in just 11 months: current cost of \$46.8 million plus land versus \$35 million cost given in May 24, 2006 board minutes.

⁵ Per March 14, 2007 board presentation, if referendum fails, funding would come from Operations and Maintenance Fund, which took in about \$10 million in revenue annually in last two budget years per district budget. This fund pays for upkeep of schools district wide, including heating, light, and cleaning.

⁶ Legat question and answer, April 25, 2007 board meeting.