

If We Care About Our Kids...

By Dr. Sue Skidmore

This statistic says it all: Arizona led the nation in cutting K-12 education funds over the past four years. This staggering \$1 billion-dollar reduction forced our schools to severely slash services to children. As both a parent and an educator, I have personally experienced the decimation of successful, instructional programs. I've seen class sizes increase. I've watched as other districts across the state discontinued full-day kindergarten programs, moved to four-day weeks, or reduced opportunities in the fine arts and in libraries. Unfortunately, the one-cent sales tax for education is set to expire next year, which will lead to even more devastating cuts if nothing is done.

Some 300,000 Arizonans signed petitions to place Proposition 204 (Quality Education and Jobs) on the ballot this fall. Proposition 204 asks voters to renew the one-cent tax they passed overwhelming in 2010 as a dedicated, stable revenue source that cannot be altered by the Legislature. If approved, 80% of the funds will be dedicated to education. These funds will be used to restore lost services, to help teachers and district and charter schools implement the rigorous new Common Core standards, to enhance career and technical education, and to fund the Arizona Department of Education's statewide, accountability database. Revenue will also be provided to fund scholarship programs for university and community college students.

The initiative also restores funding for KidsCare, which provides medical care to children of the working poor, and it creates a Family Stability Fund to help children who are hungry, homeless, or unsafe at home. Further, the initiative creates a state infrastructure fund to develop and to improve road, rail, and transit projects, which creates jobs and attracts new business.

I would urge voters to approve Proposition 204, for several reasons: Restoring funds for children in need is not only the "right thing to do," but it offers our children the opportunity to achieve success and to become productive members of the work force. If Arizona is sincerely committed to improving its economy, then it must be competitive in attracting

companies. Most high-paying, 21st century companies need highly-skilled employees. With only about one-third of Arizona's population holding college degrees, a dearth of well-trained workers exists. Without quality K-12 and college educational programs, Arizona will continue to struggle economically.

Voters have a choice. Do we endure the crippling effects of more revenue cuts? Or do we restore and improve our quality of life? Imagine a state that truly cares about its children—where every child receives enough food to eat, medical care, a spectacular education, and real economic opportunities when they graduate. The choice does not rest with the Legislature; it rests with us.

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