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Proposition 51: Education and Bonds

Education has always been a popular topic, touching both daily life and politics. California residents are concerned about whether their state should fund \$9 billion in general obligation bonds for the new construction and modernization of K-12 public school facilities, charter schools and vocational education facilities, and community college facilities. Some people argue that the state should not pay this amount (\$500 million per year for 35 years) to support the education system in California. However, from my perspective, Proposition 51 should be passed this November.

The most powerful con argument states that borrowing more state bonds will impose more debts, which the state cannot afford. Californians already pay \$2 billion each year in state school bonds, and the state has over \$400 billion in debt and other financial commitments. Therefore, Proposition 51 would cost an additional \$500 million each year; this added debt surpasses California's ability to pay. Last February, Democratic governor Jerry Brown told the *Los Angeles Times*:

"I am against the developers' \$9-billion bond...it squanders money that would be far better spent in low-income communities.....We can't possibly pay them off in a year or two or even 10. Yet, it is our moral obligation to do so — particularly before we make new commitments."

Brown's argument is true; states need to pay back previous debts in order to borrow more bonds. Another promise could put the whole state at risk. However, Proposition 51 has already attracted many donors. The construction industry—including faucet and sink companies, landscapers, painters, concrete suppliers, architects, engineers, roofers, pipe fitters and cabinet

makers—is on the funding list. Therefore, it may still be possible for the state to pay back education bonds in the future.

Local education bonds seem more effective than state education bonds. In the past few years, local bonds have enabled both local officials and schools to have direct access to money. On the other hand, state bonds are controlled by state officials, and bonds could be unequally distributed. In most cases, bonds are distributed to wealthier schools (who have accountable staff to fill out paperwork) than poorer districts who actually need money. *The Mercury News* writes that:

"Prop. 51 also would continue doling out school bond money primarily on a first-come, first-served basis rather than helping the neediest districts. ... Prop. 51 is a good deal for developers but a bad deal for taxpayers and for the neediest school districts."

In this case, education bonds distribution could bring bad effects on our education system instead of helping it. However, the state can solve this problem easily by hiring supervisors to make sure of equal distribution among various communities.

Another con is that the main beneficiaries of education bonds are not California students but construction companies. Several construction companies provide \$9 billion for California institutions; however, the money is likely used for their own economic benefits. According to the *Monterey Herald*: "Prop. 51 is primarily bankrolled by the construction industry, which would benefit from its open-endedness by having taxpayers underwrite what should primarily be the responsibility of developers." Home builders view the recontracting process as a way to earn money. This is the reason why homebuilders, developers and school construction companies got together and put school bonds on the ballot. In short, education bonds may only benefit construction companies.

Although construction companies will invest \$9 billion for themselves, students in California will still benefit from their money. Nowadays many community colleges, high schools, and elementary schools are in need of maintenance or replacement in order to meet standards for earthquake safety, fire safety, and health risks, such as asbestos and lead paint. According to Tim Smith, 2014 California Teacher of the Year, Florin High School:

"Nothing is more disheartening than teaching students when our classrooms are falling apart and don't provide access to student's basic academic needs. To help students succeed, Prop 51 will repair outdated and deteriorating schools and upgrade classroom technology, libraries, and computer and science labs."

Worries over unsafe buildings prevent parents from sending their children to local schools. Instead, students choose to take classes at home; the increase of home-schooling creates competition with local public schools. Therefore, it is important to provide a safe environment for California students. Besides, California has not passed an education bond in ten years, which makes people believe the state does not care about education except in an economic capacity. It is time for state to apply effective policies and fix the inequalities between different California communities.

Improving and expanding California schools would also improve the economy. Education bonds will prevent the increase of local home-construction fees and create new jobs for construction workers in school areas.

An improvement in colleges would make affordable education accessible to more students, even adults such as veterans. More and more people would have education opportunities and good job prospects. As Jonathan Lightman, Executive Director, Faculty Association of California Community Colleges states:

“Our community colleges contribute to the economic and social strength of local communities throughout the state, and help college students avoid thousands of dollars in debt. We need to show our support to California's students.”

Education opportunities make good jobs available to more California residents and reduce college debt, thereby boosting the overall economy. Besides, certain communities will be able to prevent increasing local home construction fees. Since the education bonds will increase the demand for house construction, house construction fees will decrease. This is another economic benefit.

As far as I am concerned, we can safely arrive at the conclusion that Proposition 51 will pass the vote. A safer studying environment, better educational equipment, nicer facilities, equal education opportunities, more job opportunities, and potential economic benefits all contribute to a better California community.