

Letter to the Editor: Give Us Back Our \$850,000 Before You Ask Us for More Money

Imagine this! You give someone \$850,000 to renovate your house, the work is never done and you find out that this person spent the money elsewhere. Four years later, this same person comes back to you and now asks for \$3 million to do the same work they never did! Would you give that person \$3 million more after they stole \$850,000 from you? I know I wouldn't!

This is exactly what the Clifton School Board did at their Nov 11, 2009 meeting when they voted to put two referendum questions (for a total of \$8 million) on the ballot in April 2010. The first ballot referendum question is for \$3 million to renovate the Clifton High School Auditorium and the second ballot referendum question is for \$5 million for building improvements (such as new windows) in certain buildings. Their lame excuse for putting these referendums questions on the ballot is that the State will give us 40% of the money despite the fact that taxpayers can not afford even 60% of this cost. (Please remember we are still waiting for the \$4 million in state aid for 290 Brighton Road and the school board had to borrow against this money.) This would be on top of the already anticipated \$4 million shortfall in state aid that BOE President. Daley announced at his recent town hall meeting. Remember each \$550,000 in spending equates to one tax point! This would be almost a 22 tax point increase (if we didn't get once again get the state aid)!

If you recall, back in 2007, I was the one who uncovered that the BOE spent the \$850,000 earmarked in the 2005/2006 budget for the CHS auditorium renovation elsewhere! It was only after continued questioning by me that they admitted that it was spent elsewhere but never provided the public with exactly where this huge sum of money was spent (see my Oct 12, 2007 letter to the editor in the Clifton Insider). At the Nov 11, 2009 meeting, Karen Perkins finally acknowledged that the \$850,000 was put into surplus and then spent (probably on 290 Brighton Road since the BOE moved \$1.2 million from surplus to pay for the cost overruns on the project and ended last year with only \$13,000 left in surplus). Again, the lame excuse was that bids for the high school renovation came in at \$2 million so they chose not to do some of the renovations for \$850,000 and just spent our hard earned tax dollars elsewhere. This is zero fiscal accountability, zero creditability and zero managerial skills!

Each and every Clifton taxpayer should be as outraged as I am and should call for the school board to return our \$850,000 BEFORE they have the audacity to ask us for \$3 million more! Here are some reasons why!

First, the BOE took our \$850,000 under false pretenses! They represented to the public that this money would be used for the high school renovations and it wasn't. Second, they purposely withheld this spending information from the public until it was uncovered by the public. Third, the BOE has proved time and time again that they lack any fiscal accountability as shown by the \$millions in cost overruns at 290 Brighton Road; budgeting another \$500,000 for the stadium & bathroom renovations and then only starting the project after public under covered that they had asked the City Council for another \$1million contribution for this project even and then completed the project at a cost of \$41,000 (where's the remaining \$459,000?); signing a \$1 million fiber optic contract without the funds to pay for it; \$300,000 spent on bogus ethics charges; \$1.7 million spent on legal fees over the last few years; \$ thousands spent to defend the bogus

Traier and Company lawsuit to reinstate the two BOE attorneys. Fourth, the BOE has proven that they lack the necessary budgetary and project management skills to oversee any building project. The BOE claims that while they only budgeted \$850,000 for the auditorium renovations bids came in significantly higher. This is utter nonsense! Before any project is undertaken, the scope, specifications and cost estimates are prepared and so that the appropriate amount of money can be allocated. According to the BOE, none of this was done beforehand and they just picked a number out of a hat and then they found out (after the fact) that it wasn't enough! Fifth, the BOE has inflated the school budgets each year in an effort to hide more money from the taxpayers. Beginning in 2005/2006 budget the BOE included the \$850,000 for the auditorium renovations and the \$500,000 stadium renovations in the general budget rather than include these costs in a separate referendum question. Therefore, in the next year's (2006/2007) budget should have gone down by \$1.35 million since these two projects were not in the budget. However, it didn't. So now five years later the 2009/2010 budget is inflated by \$6.75 million just for these projects alone!

At the Nov 11, 2009 meeting the BOE represented that the Clifton City Council was in favor of these two referendum questions. If you remember, back in 2007, I appeared before the Clifton City Council and called on the Council to help uncover the missing \$850,000 and \$500,000 monies! I called on the Council to call for an independent audit of the school board spending and these missing monies. Unfortunately, not one Council person joined in my pleas for an independent audit. In fact, one council person screamed at me that I should go to the prosecutor with this and not bother the Council!

The time has come for the City Council to lead the charge to uncover all wasteful and fraudulent spending in the City of Clifton. How is taking \$850,000 from taxpayers under false pretenses any different than the payroll company that stole \$900,000 from the city council?

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