

The Pueblo Chieftain

PRO: Vote for Savings Account for Education

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Voters in Colorado have more direct power than in almost any other state. Getting a measure on the state ballot is relatively easy, and voter approval is required to raise taxes.

With that power comes responsibility, notably the responsibility to make wise financial decisions and plan well for the long-term economic health of the state.

That's why Amendment 59, the SAFE (Savings Account For Education) amendment, is so important this year. By voting for Amendment 59, Coloradans can create a long-term savings account for education. We can make sure our state government saves during good economic times so that there will be a reserve for bad economic times, the same way a family or business handles its budget.

Amendment 59 won't solve every problem, but it will provide permanent and more stable funding for education. And support for education is the single best investment we can make in Colorado's economy and Colorado's future.

The situation is serious. Despite great efforts by teachers and many other committed professionals, Colorado is not doing a good job of preparing our kids for the jobs of the future. Too many are simply not getting the skills they need. With the global marketplace becoming ever more competitive, correcting this deficiency is critical if our children and grandchildren are to have the opportunity to prosper.

The numbers tell the story: Colorado has more than 18,000 dropouts every year. The loss in earning potential for those and other adult Coloradans who have not completed high school is as much as \$3.4 billion, according to the Donnell-Kay Foundation and the Colorado Children's Campaign.

Even when young people stay in school, there is a persistent achievement gap between students from low-income families and those at the other end of the spectrum. That gap leads to an opportunity gap, as those with less education are less likely to make a livable wage or earn enough to support a family.

Gov. Bill Ritter, who says "education is the foundation of Colorado's economy," has set a goal of cutting the dropout rate in half and doubling the number of post-secondary degrees and

certificates by 2017. Those are admirable and achievable goals, but it will require investment in preschool-through-high school education.

Amendment 59 puts the money where it counts, into the classroom. It will support education programs, including for preschool and kindergarten, and reduce class sizes, add new technology and boost school construction. It does this without raising taxes and while preserving the right to vote on tax increases in the future.

Given the difficult financial times we are in, now is the time for responsible action: Amendment 59 is an investment in our children, our economy and our state.

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