

## Local leaders split on school voucher bill

By Zachary Pearlman

The Durant-Wilton superintendent and the state representative from Wilton both opposed the school voucher plan proposed by Governor Kim Reynolds last year.

This year, their opinions differ.

The Student First Act, a bill passed in late January, allows parents to use around \$7,600 in state funding to pay for tuition for their students to attend a private school in the state of Iowa.

Rep. Bobby Kaufmann voted for the voucher bill while Supt. Joe Burnett continued his public opposition, even writing a letter to the *Wilton-Durant Advocate News* before the final legislative vote.

Mr. Burnett is against using taxpayer money to fund private education because these schools do not have to meet the same requirements as public schools.

Rep. Kaufmann explained why he shifted his position on the bill this year.

“For years, I was hesitant to support legislation like this and did not support legislation like this for the simple reason that I didn’t see a demand,” he said. “I did not have any parents coming to me expressing concerns at our local schools or anything.”

However, Rep. Kaufmann said he is hearing too many complaints from parents of students in urban schools.

“Their kids are either stuck in a system that is failing, which there are some pretty poor urban schools, or they are in a system where their teachers and school board are ignoring parents,” he said.

Rep. Kaufmann said parents at small schools still love their teachers, superintendents, and the school itself.

“Durant is amazing, Wilton is amazing, West Branch, Tipton, North Cedar, Walcott, the list goes on and on for public schools that are doing phenomenal, I mean A plus work,” he said.

He believes this bill will not affect smaller rural schools in Iowa. He said that in other states, voucher plans similar to the Students First Act complement public schools.

Mr. Burnett said he was “disappointed” that this bill passed.

“I believe that this is more about common sense,” he said. “There are people that golf at private golf courses who pay taxes, and their taxes go to municipal golf courses. We don’t subsidize people to go to golf at a private golf course.”

Mr. Burnett said he was confused why the government does not have the same mindset with schooling.

“We don’t subsidize private businesses, yet in education it is okay to send tax dollars to private schools,” he said.

Rep. Kaufmann said he believes Mr. Burnett is one of the best superintendents in the state of Iowa and has the highest amount of respect for him. However, he

believes Mr. Burnett is not correct when it comes to taxpayer dollars and private businesses.

“The state gives out tens of millions of dollars to private entities,” he said. “This is not new, this has been happening for decades. Furthermore, the state has been providing a substantial amount of money to these private schools for years.”

Mr. Burnett said another issue he had with the voucher bill came from tuition costs at some private schools.

If you wanted to go to high school at Iowa City Regina, it would cost \$18,495,” he said. “It would help pay for that [private school], but if I am a single parent or of someone with a lower economic status... I still have to make ends meet. I would still have to find over ten grand to get my child to Regina, and I have to drive them there every day.”

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## Proposed bills to restrict LGBTQ discussion in schools

By Ryan Brown

Three bills proposed in the Iowa Legislature would restrict LGBTQ discussion inside Iowa schools.

House File 9, co-sponsored by Rep. Bobby Kaufmann of Wilton, would prohibit schools from making any accommodations for a transgender student without parental permission.

The bill also prohibits schools from “encouraging or coercing” students to withhold gender identity information from their parents and prevents the school from doing the same.

Two other bills proposed in the House and Senate deal with curriculum.

House File 8 would prohibit “instruction related to gender identity and sex-

ual orientation in school districts and charter schools in kindergarten through grade three.” A Senate bill would prohibit any instruction on gender identity in grades K-8.

Junior Jaeho Holbert, a transgender student who attended Durant High School last year before transferring to Muscatine High School, is very worried about what harm HF 9 could pose for transgender individuals.

“I think that it’s gonna put a lot of trans people in danger, and it’s just gonna make overall school life harder for them,” said Holbert.

“There are many teachers who have no issue using preferred pronouns for students, but they might not be able to, which also makes it harder for the teachers because they want to be able to use them, but they can’t.”

Holbert says that while lawmakers may think this will make life more ideal, it really could pose a lot of harm.

“I think that some people think that being transgender is not a thing, or it’s not right,” he said. “And I think by adding these precautions, it’s making it harder for them to be who they are, which they hope will push them ‘back into the closet.’”

Holbert feels that the proposed leg-

islation might take away the only safe place some students may have—at school.

“I have a lot of friends who their parents are not nearly necessarily accepting, and it would make school life terrible for them because school is really the only place where they’re actually gendered and named correctly, and their parents would not allow them to use those names and pronouns, and it would make it really rough for them.”

Holbert believes HF 9 would prevent transgender students from exploring their identity.

“I think that it would force them to try and hide it longer, which is obviously not good because then it makes it difficult for them to be themselves,” he said.

Rep. Kaufmann said HF 9 is essential because he doesn’t believe in withholding information from parents. When responding to the notion that this bill could ‘out’ transgender students, Rep. Kaufmann said that is an issue that should be worked out between the school, the child, and the child’s parents.

“I believe these are decisions as a group between the parents, the school and the student. You leave any of those three out in any of these equations, you don’t have

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## Green Out celebrates 11 years



Guest speaker Mrs. Jeanine Schwarte Flies from Norwalk hugs Mrs. Suzy Bohnsack from Durant during the Green Out event Jan. 27.

By Kiyah Daily

For 11 years, Durant has hosted an annual Green Out basketball game in honor of organ and tissue donation, but this year’s ceremony on Jan. 27 was extra special.

Former Durant teacher Mrs. Suzy Bohnsack puts the Green Out game together every year, not only in memory of her daughter Emily, who died in a car accident 12 years ago, but to raise awareness about organ donation.

“The whole night was magical, I think,” said Mrs. Bohnsack, “because everyone was just embracing the whole night.”

Less than a month before, on Jan. 2, Mrs. Bohnsack and her family attended

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## 3 seniors will vote ‘yes’ March 7 for bond referendum

By Grace Paustian

Durant residents will vote on a \$15.6 million bond referendum on March 7, and three Durant seniors who are eligible to vote plan to do their part for the Durant community.

“I’m going to vote yes,” said senior Alex Rappel. “To be quite honest, I feel it is all necessary. We do need a better auditorium, a better [middle school] gym and upgraded offices.”

If the bond does not pass, Rappel said he will “feel bad for the future students that will attend our school along with staff members.”

Rappel and seniors Nora Ramer and Ashley Shelangoski are voting on something that won’t be beneficial to them as students; however, they are voting for the future of the school.

“I am going to vote yes because our school desperately needs to get done,”

said Ramer, who said a renovated auditorium is the most important part of the bond in her opinion.

“I am in choir and drama, so I know more than probably a lot of other people how badly it needs to get done,” she said. “The curtains are falling apart, the seats are falling apart, there is no room backstage for anything.”

If the bond does not pass, Ramer will feel disappointed in our community “for not realizing how necessary it is.”

Shelangoski said she would also feel disappointed if the bond does not pass.

“I’ll be a little upset even though I won’t be able to use them, but our school needs some upgrades,” she said. “A lot of what is in the bond is needs and not wants.”

Shelangoski feels that the renovations to the auditorium and the middle school gym are “immediately necessary” because both are so out of date.

Sixty percent of voters must approve of the bond referendum for it to pass.

One of the major projects would be renovating the middle school gym, which was first built in 1936. The gym would get a high school-sized floor, which would allow varsity teams to practice on the court.

Another major project is to renovate the existing auditorium by adding a larger stage and more storage and expanding the seating capacity to 425 seats.

The bond will also include replacing and renovating aging equipment and furnishings in the science and art classrooms.

General updates will also be made throughout the building including painting and adding new flooring and ceilings.

Updates will also be made to the heating and electrical systems to extend their life, a new sprinkler system will be installed, and new windows will be added to the elementary classrooms.

Three public hearings will have been held prior to the bond vote. Around 30-40 Durant residents showed up at the first two hearings.

The school district is made up of residents from three different counties. If you live in Cedar County, you will need to vote at the Durant Community Center. If you live in Scott County, you must vote at the Calvary United Methodist Church in Walcott. If you live in Muscatine County, you must vote at the Stockton City Hall.

If the bond passes, taxes will increase \$4.05 per \$1,000.

Air conditioning won’t be added to the bond referendum due to the fact that it would cost another \$7 million. Two high school students who served on the facility advisory committee (FAC) said that air conditioning wasn’t a priority in the school because it would only be used for a couple of weeks at the start of the school year.