

Good afternoon my name is Danielle Corti I am the board Chair of the Oxbow Unified Union School District. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I've been a school board member for 10 years and this past year has been the most challenging that I have ever encountered.

I am here today because our district has been unable to pass a school budget. Our original vote was to take place on April 14th from the floor that vote was rescheduled to take place as an Australian ballot on June 30th. Prior to warning the budget the board spent time looking over our originally proposed budget and made a few adjustments decreasing the originally warned amount from \$17,373,392.00 to \$17,265,781. A decrease of \$107,600.00. We mailed ballots to all voters in the district. The vote failed, 523 voted no and 323 voted yes. The board and administration went back to the budget and cut an additional 1.1% bringing the new warned amount down to \$17,086,683.00. As part of this reduction the OUUSD board reached out to the OESU board and asked for them to authorize the reopening of the OESU budget in order to find some savings for our district. This request was unanimously supported. The OESU board authorized that at least \$50,000.00 in savings be found. We warned the vote for September 1st and followed the recommendations of the town clerks not to mail ballots to every voter. For three significant reasons one, the amount of work the clerks need to do for the mailings. Two, the Primary was also being held that month and three, the expense. It cost approximately \$8,000.00 to mail ballots to all voters. The budget again failed with the votes being 273 no and 184 yes. Less than 15% of our community voted.

While I think that it is very important that our community be involved in passing a school budget I am also keenly aware of our need to provide stability for our students and school staff. I cannot speak for the entire

board directly but I can say that the board knows that it is vital that we have as many options available to us to provide the financial support and stability that is going to be needed over the next year in our schools.

I think the voting situation has been compounded dramatically by our inability to meet publicly and speak face-to-face with our voters. The reliance of social media and publication of information has made it very difficult for the community to understand budget changes and adjustments being made. It is harder for them to feel involved in the process. The current community sentiment is that the OESU budget is too high and they are unhappy with what they see as a loss of local control due to the Act 46 merge. It is difficult to get the message across that at this point we do not have the ability to change the OESU budget. That we only have authority to make changes to our local district budget. If we continue to make cuts to this budget there is no doubt that it will have direct negative impacts on our students and staff. In fact in my opinion it already has. When I testified in front of you in May I made it clear that my concern was having an equal playing field for our students and our staff. There is no doubt in my mind that we are already feeling that inequality. The load that our administration and staff is carrying amidst preparing to open schools during a global pandemic has been made even heavier due to the uncertainty created by multiple failed budgets. If we are not able to have a budget within 1% of our most recently warned budget our students and staff will be at an even greater disadvantage. Even in comparison with the neighboring schools in our own SU that were able to pass budgets pre COVID never mind state wide.

What I'm asking for is the legislature to provide us with the opportunity to default to our previously warned budget -1% if we are unable to pass a budget in October. I believe that while our community may be frustrated with this option they will ultimately understand it as a necessary step in to provide the needed financial stability. I am optimistic that over the next 30 days we will be able to continue to reach out to our communities and explain our current situation and why it is essential that they support this budget and this district.

As Emilie points out over the past year the merger has taken a toll. People feel that we have lost local control and voice. While I hear them and can see why they feel that way. I also have the board perspective. In the last year I have personally seen the positive changes being made at both the SU level and the District level. I feel that the SU board has become more collaborative and is beginning to act in a way that focuses on all schools being equal and not just individual schools. On the OUUSD board I feel that relationships between the board, administration and staff have been able to move in a very positive direction. As the board chair I see the incredible potential and am committed to working through the growing pains of the merge. I believe that once we have been given time to establish ourselves the community will also see that while yes, there has been change, the board and administration is still focused on doing what is best for our students, our schools and our communities.

#### Timeline and details:

April 14th floor vote cancellation-

Warned budget amount: \$17,373,392.00

Bradford tax rate: \$1.7476

Percent increase: 10.91%

Newbury tax rate: \$1.6834

Percent increase: 8.11%

June 30th Australian Ballot-

Warned budget amount: \$17,265,781

Bradford tax rate: \$1.7145

Percent increase: 8.82%

Newbury tax rate: \$1.6516

Percent increase: 6.07%

523 no 323 yes

September 1st Australian Ballot-

Warned budget amount: \$17,086,683

Bradford tax rate: \$1.6899

Percent increase: 7.25%

Newbury tax rate: \$1.6279

Percent increase: 4.54%

273 no 184 yes