

The Pueblo Chieftain Online

Fixing schools - Editorial

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Energy exploration on state school lands is going great guns, meaning that funding generated there which is expressly targeted for schools has increased significantly in recent years.

Thus House Speaker Andrew Romanoff and State Treasurer Cary Kennedy are proposing to use \$30 million to \$40 million annually from the School Land Trust over five years and leverage that into some form of bonding to aid school districts which cannot or at least have limited means to pay for schoolhouse repairs or replacements.

Most of those districts are on the eastern plains and in the San Luis Valley. The funding proposal would give precedence to the schools which are in the worst shape and to districts least able to fund capital projects on their own.

In other words, Cherry Creek schools need not apply.

State Sen. Abel Tapia, D-Pueblo, a former member of the Joint Budget Committee and now Senate President Pro Tem, notes that this plan would not take money from other areas of the state budget because money from school lands is to be used exclusively for schools. Depending on local school districts' ability to provide some funding, the program could reach toward \$1 billion over the life of the program.

As a sidebar, it should be noted that some of the districts needing funds are in well-to-do counties. An example is the Edison District in rural El Paso County. Unlike Pueblo County, where small districts were consolidated into District 70, small systems such as Edison remain isolated and have few people and low tax bases.

It would make good public policy for El Paso County to consolidate its school districts as have Pueblo and other counties.

Meanwhile, the Romanoff-Kennedy proposal for state aid to the neediest districts in Colorado makes eminently good sense. The Legislature should agree.

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