

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to share with you today. Ironically, it was 4 years ago yesterday that I announced my candidacy for the Coeur d'Alene School Board. Some of you may remember that my official announcement was made first to the Reagan Republicans. Though I hope it did not show, I was very nervous that day, not knowing what type of reception to expect.

Little did I know walking in the outpouring of support I would receive from your gracious group. Rick and Joy Seward were my first ever donors proudly handing me a check in support of my campaign. I don't know that they will ever fully know what that particular moment meant to me.

Jeff Ward offered to run my campaign and that the club would donate his fee. What a great job he did as we beat a firmly anointed incumbent with 56% of the vote!

Many of you spent long Saturdays with me walking neighborhoods listening to concerns and sharing thoughts on how to address those concerns. To a degree, I always feel as though I'm "coming home" when I'm invited to share my thoughts with the Reagan Republicans.

The decision regarding whether or not I would seek re-election has weighed heavily on my mind, heart and spirit for many months and it has caused me to spend many hours in reflection and contemplation. If you'll indulge me, I'd like to share some of those thoughts with you here as the ground work for my decision regarding this Spring's election.

A big part of that process for me has involved a look back at what we have accomplished during my time on the Board. Like many people, I need to know that the efforts I expend are having an impact and that my time has been well spent. I do believe that my first two years on

the Board can be characterized, at least to me, as living up to my own expectations.

The first item of business was to do away with the “Resign / Appoint” scheme which had been used for decades in Coeur d’Alene to maintain a power base of like-minded individuals. To say that the Board at the time was representative of our community as a whole was laughable at best and it didn’t take a genius to figure out the scheme they had cooked up to keep it that way. Dear Edie Brooks even stated during her illegal appointment of Wanda Quinn that it was “her seat and she had every right to appoint someone who thought like she did!” I think that one statement speaks volumes as to what Edie felt about public input maybe even more so than her shouting down of a parent at a Board Meeting when she so eloquently stated “Sit down, shut up! We are done listening to you!”

It took a great deal of courage to sue the Board, but what they had done was not only unethical, it was contrary to the law and it disenfranchised the voters from having a say in electing those who represent them. Those were stressful (and expensive!) months for me but prevailing in our pursuit will forever be one of the most gratifying moments in my service to our community.

We moved on to the IB/PYP issue. Oh boy. While it is easy for critics to lob accusations of partisanship related to this issue, the truth is that we as a Board spent 18 months looking at what ended up being an expensive, deeply flawed and academically failed program. The decision to eliminate IB was made based on the empirical evidence that clearly showed declining enrollment, low test scores, lack of post-secondary benefit and most of all a very large price tag. Defense of the program was made purely from ideology devoid of evidence showing true benefit and yet again, we were branded radicals for eliminating the

program. Despite the criticism, I stand by that decision knowing full well what I personally invested in making sure it was the right one.

I freely admit to a number of deeply held pre-conceived notions when I first started my service to our Board. That the district was irresponsible with money. That they should be able to fund their operations without a supplemental levy. That there was a concerted effort to turn our students into little socialists beginning in Kindergarten. While there are grains of truth in each of those statements, I wanted to make sure that I was educated about district operations before I made any decisions that would impact our kids. I wanted to make sure I was armed with knowledge and not merely speculation and whispered rumors.

The truth is, I had my mind changed about many things. I will forever be grateful to patient administrators who took the time to answer my questions and who helped me become a good trustee. What I found were hard-working people who were dedicated to serving our children as best they knew how. While we often disagreed on the means of accomplishing that the debates were always respectful and solution minded.

I have grown to love and deeply admire Hazel Bauman as an intelligent and courageous leader. She invested in me, freely shared her thoughts, listened to mine and was willing to compromise in seeking the best for our kids.

Rosie Astorqia is a grand woman with a quick wit, sharp tongue and bottomless patience. She had a way of making me see things in a new perspective while never making me feel stupid in the process.

Lynn Towne, Clerk of the Board had a stable full of new trustees over my term that she had to wrangle over my term in office. She is tireless, patient, gracious, kind and a wealth of knowledge about our district

who spent hours answering questions, gathering data and helping me succeed.

Laura Rumpler is tireless servant in a thankless job who cares about our kids and our district more than anyone I know. She is brilliant and gifted and had a way of making sure that I didn't step on my own tongue too often.

I could go on and on, listing countless people including teachers and principals, bus drivers and custodians who while they may have been rolling their eyes at me in their mind, never let that interfere with taking the time to help me learn.

The funny thing about my critics is that if they truly looked at my actions as a trustee, I don't think they could find where I made a politically motivated decision. Ever.

In fact, I often voted contrary to my personal feelings on a subject because after taking the time to truly understand the issue, I had to make the best decision for our district despite how I might "feel" about it personally.

Case in point would be the first time I voted in support of a supplemental levy. I had perennially been the guy that showed up to vote against our district levies. I truly believed that the district should be able to live within the funding the state provided. However, after countless hours of educating myself, it became clear that I was wrong so I voted to support the levy and actively worked to see it pass.

I am most proud of my time as Chairman of our Board. During that time our Board pushed the district to take bold and courageous steps to challenge the status quo. We rewrote policy that had been modified to limited parental input. We challenged the district to look at outsourcing of "non-classroom" items such as custodial work and

transportation as a means of saving money. We held Community Chats to open the door to constituents and allow them free and unfettered access to their elected officials to make sure their voice was heard...even those who did not agree with what we were doing.

We successfully passed a \$33M school improvement bond that allowed us to update, upgrade and replace some of our oldest buildings. We did this by winnowing down the \$60M in “suggestions” from the Long Range Planning committee into a package that would address the most dire needs without increasing taxes.

Probably the accomplishment of which I am most proud is the launch of the anti-bully task force which has seen great success in our schools. While it would seem that this was something the district would embrace (and ironically now does) it occurred only because the Board demanded it over some strong opposition from certain administrators within the district.

We brought the Core Knowledge Program to Coeur d’Alene which represented a turn back to a more “classic education” focused on great literary works and the foundations of our society being based on common history and common knowledge.

I have much to be proud of and very little that I regret.

However, in looking at the decision to seek re-election, I have to look both at what I have accomplished, but also what can be accomplished going forward.

I have read and re-read a book called Crazy Love by Francis Chan. In that book he cites a quote from D.L. Moody that impacted me very deeply. Moody said that “Our biggest fear in life should not be of failing, but of succeeding in things that really don’t matter.”

And that brings me to the crux of my decision.

My first two years on the Board were a whirlwind of courageous decisions, bold leadership and a willingness to challenge the status quo. We also had a superintendent who was willing to embrace those changes and put diligent effort into implementing them.

The two years since have largely been riding the coat tails of those first two years.

Please don't get me wrong, I do admire the board members that we currently have and am grateful that they are willing to serve. We work well together and I do believe that for the most part, they have the best interest of our students at heart. They are not bad people, but they are largely satisfied with the status quo and don't see a reason to challenge the administration to do more.

Most importantly, our board and our superintendent don't hear the voices of their critics as clearly as they should and we have moved back to dismissing those who criticize public education as radicals, rather than attempting to understand and find solutions to their concerns.

Parents who ask to opt out of the standardized testing are told that their only choice is to dis-enroll their kids from the Coeur d'Alene school district. That isn't a choice. That's a cop out. And that is something that our Board should stand up and fight with all we have! But they won't.

Core Knowledge was summarily dismissed despite interest and success (and by the way, almost no cost to the district) with one Board member even stating that he opposed Core Knowledge simply because Brent Regan supported it. He really had no other reason.

The Board spent hours drafting policy that we believe reflected the desires of our community only to find it ignored and not enforced at the building level. One principal even went so far as to say that we

could “write whatever we wanted in our policies” but that he was “going to do it his way just the same.” Policy is only paper if it isn’t enforced.

I could fight these battles. And I could win. But to what end and at what cost?

I don’t need to win every battle nor do I need to always be right. But I do need to work in an environment willing to challenge status quo and to never be satisfied with a result no matter how good it may seem to be.

I need to know that what I’m doing matters. For the last two years, my service on the Board hasn’t mattered.

When I look at myself and the legacy I wish to leave, I define myself in the following terms and in this order. Christ Follower. Husband. Dad. Friend. Employer. Community Member and a Leader.

For my service to our community, I have been labeled ignorant, homophobic, racist, a pitch fork wielding barbarian, radical and a moron. My family has watched me be attacked and have endured attacks of their own all because I dared to step up and serve. I have seen the ugliest our community has to offer and for what offense? For daring to speak an opinion contrary to their own and willingness to act upon my convictions.

All of that I am willing to endure. All of that my family are willing to endure. They have asked me to run again with my middle daughter Elizabeth saying “Dad, if you don’t stay on the Board, then the bullies will win.” Wise words from a brilliant young woman.

But in the end, I have to look at what matters and I can’t help but listen to the wisdom of Solomon when he says that all is vanity and chasing after the wind.

Many don't know that I have spent 10 years of my life teaching Sunday School at our church. One of my beautiful little Kindergartners brought it all into perspective for me earlier this year. He brought me a cake during the play-offs that said Go Seahawks! because he knows how much I love my Hawks! More meaningful than the cake was the card he made me to go with it. On it he wrote: "Dear Tom – I love the Seahawks. And I love Jesus!"

Now there's the stuff that matters! Striving after things eternal and setting aside the things that encumber us in that endeavor.

Not all will agree with me and that's okay. This is my decision to make and I have to live with it.

I can tell you with all clarity that my decision to run originally was made from pride and nothing more. Despite that failure, I do believe God blessed my service to our community and I will forever be grateful that I had the opportunity.

However, this time around I spent time prayerfully seeking His direction and that direction is clear. God has a plan for me but it does not involve further service in political office.

I will continue to invest in our community because I love where I live and I do believe that "Love you neighbor as yourself" is the most noble of callings. In that view, it has become clear to me that my service on the school board has become an idol that replaces the time I need to spend on other things that have eternal and not merely earthly significance.

To those who are disappointed with my decision, I do offer you my sincere apology as well as my deep gratitude for your support.

Thank you again for having me here today...