# OPINION

SUNDAY, October 25, 2026

## ELECTION 2026: SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEVY

Considering some of the measures on Inland Northwest ballots from both sides of the issue

**VOTE YES**

# Yes on the Spokane Public Schools levy to continue providing necessary support

**By Carol A. Wendle**

For much of my life, I have had the privilege of working with and for young people in Spokane. I began my career as an elementary teacher and later served for 11 years on the Spokane Public Schools Board of Directors. I have also spent many years volunteering with organizations dedicated to children, education and our community.

Those experiences have given me an appreciation for both the opportunities public schools provide and the responsibility school districts have to use public dollars carefully.

This November, Spokane voters will consider a replacement Educations Programs and Operations, or EP&O, levy for Spokane Public Schools. The three-year levy would replace the current levy when it expires at the end of 2027.

It is important for voters to understand what this funding does. Washington state provides the largest share of funding for public schools, but it does not fully fund every program, and service that districts provide. Local levy dollars help fill that gap. In Spokane Public Schools, the levy represents approximately 15% of the district's operating budget.

These dollars support things families see in schools every day: smaller class sizes, special education, school safety, mental health services, nurses and counselors. They also help pay for technology, career and technical education, advanced learning, arts, athletics and extracurricular activities.

During my years working in education, I learned that educating children involves much more than what happens during a single class period. Students need strong teachers and academics, but they also need adults who know them, activities that connect them to school and opportunities to discover their interest and prepare for their futures.

The community should also expect accountability for the public dollars entrusted to its schools.

Spokane Public Schools has faced significant financial pressures in recent years, including historic inflation and rising costs. The district has responded through careful financial management and efficiencies, including adjusting staffing through attrition. These efforts have helped maintain a balanced budget while maximizing impacts on programs and services for students.

At the same time, students are making progress. The district has placed greater emphasis on early literacy and its goal of having students read proficiently by the end of third grade. More students are graduating than ever before, increasing numbers are completing Advanced Placement coursework and students have access to career and technical education programs that prepare them for life after high school.

That work continues to grow. In fall 2027, Spokane will launch a new Trades High School program in partnership with Spokane Community College, expanding opportunities for students to gain hands-on skills and prepare for their futures.

Having served on the school board, I know there will always be difficult decisions about budgets, priorities and how limited resources should be used. Asking questions about those decisions is an important part of public education. I also know firsthand how important local funding is to maintain the programs and opportunities our community expects for its students.

For generations, Spokane has demonstrated its commitment to public education. Our schools belong to all of us, whether we currently have children or grandchildren sitting in a classroom or simply care about the future of the community we call home. Strong schools help strengthen our neighborhood, our workforce and Spokane's future.

I encourage Spokane residents to Vote Yes on the replacement levy included on the Nov. 2 election ballot to continue providing the necessary local support for students attending Spokane Public Schools.

*Carol A. Wendle is a retired teacher and former school board member. She lives in Spokane.*

**VOTE NO**

# No on the Spokane Public Schools levy: Families need tax relief, not more spending

**By Russell Neff**

We all want great schools. We want our children to succeed, teachers to be supported. Wanting great schools and approving another tax renewal are two very different things.

Voting NO on the Spokane Public Schools levy is not voting against students or teachers. It is voting for fiscal reflection and taxpayer relief. We need to vote no!

Spokane families are stretched by rising costs in groceries, housing, insurance and utilities. For a family desperately needing an extra $1,000 a year, that money can help. Why should taxpayers sacrifice when citizens are being taxed higher from the state of Washington and the city of Spokane. Fifty-six percent of Spokane children are on school food assistance. Families need a break!

This levy requests the maximum allowable rate of $2.50 per $1,000 of assessed property value. For a $400,000 home, that represents roughly $1,000 annually. The city has approved another local sales tax increase scheduled to begin in January 2027. How much more can working families afford?

In my conversations with Spokane Public Schools' financial officer, you should know that approximately 97% of last year's levy dollars in 2025, went toward additional salaries and benefits that are not "needed" and not covered by state funding. If that percentage applies to the proposed renewed $333 million levy, approximately $323 million would go toward additional salaries and benefits.

Are we funding essential education, or maintaining a growing structure of additional staffing and services that taxpayers can no longer afford? It's a fair question.

Not every position in SPS is necessary. Some positions are wants, not needs. The district has become accustomed to spending beyond what the state identifies as basic education. Over time, additional jobs and programs and yesterday's extras became today's supposed necessities.

Washington's Constitution places responsibility for funding basic education on the state. Homeowners should not continually fill the gap for spending beyond basic requirements. Taxpayers deserve to know which jobs are essential and which services receive funding elsewhere. SPS warns of potential counselor losses if the levy fails. However, some counseling support is funded through county programs and federal Medicaid. The district should explain which services actually depend on levy funding and which already receive support elsewhere.

Spokane no longer has an abundant base of income capable of absorbing endless taxes. How can families afford education costs exceeding $22,000 per student when school bond (building) debt is included?

SPS has already cut more than 200 positions in recent past, demonstrating that the district can operate with fewer employees. Why should taxpayers approve another maximum-rate levy without reconciling which positions are truly necessary?

We must confront student outcomes. Figures cited in this debate indicate approximately 40% of Spokane students are not meeting math standards, 32% are falling short in English and nearly one in three is chronically absent. These are serious problems requiring serious solutions, not simply another renewed infusion of money.

Before asking for a levy renewal, the district should continue to demonstrate how existing "extra" resources improve classroom instruction, attendance and academic achievement.

If this levy fails, Spokane Public Schools will continue receiving state funding for basic education. Sports will continue and school bands and theatre will still exist. The district must prioritize spending and make difficult choices, just as families and private businesses do. Some supplemental programs or positions may be reduced. But rejecting this levy does not mean rejecting public education, teachers or students.

Inflation affects taxpayers, too. Families must distinguish needs from wants and live within their means. School districts should do the same.

Spokane families should not have to choose between supporting education and keeping their households financially stable.

Vote NO. We need a budget that recognizes taxpayers have limits.

Our children deserve good schools. Our teachers deserve support. Spokane taxpayers deserve responsible government, fiscal accountability, and relief from ever-increasing costs. Many citizens are in dire need of financial relief.

*Russell Neff is an engineer in Spokane. He is the parent of a 2025 SPS graduate and has been very involved in the schools as a parent since 2019.*

# Sensible steps on healthcare caused uproar. Now the numbers are in

**OUTSIDE VIEW**

**By Washington Post Editorial Board**

Healthcare keeps growing more expensive because the American system is less and less a free market. Fewer people pay directly for medical care, and government heavily subsidizes demand without increasing supply, a sure route to higher prices. The Biden administration worsened these dynamics by making it too easy to sign up for zero-premium insurance plans under the Affordable Care Act – which invited rampant fraud – and by extending unnecessary Medicare Part D subsidies.

The Trump administration took reasonable and modest steps to address both problems. Democratic leaders characterized them as draconian cuts. Now the numbers are in, and the sky didn't fall.

Last month, the Trump administration's anti-fraud task force announced the cancellation of about 760,000 enrollees who had zero-premium health plans. Investigators believed these were phantom customers. The Biden administration, in its eagerness to increase Obamacare enrollment, inadvertently fostered a cottage industry of unscrupulous intermediaries signing people up for plans, sometimes without their knowledge, to reap the resulting commissions.

Every now-removed account met five criteria: It was signed up for by an agent or broker, not the enrollee. It had no Social Security number or immigration identification number. The cost was covered entirely by taxpayers. It had not been used this year. And the insurer had never been in contact with the enrollee. The administration estimates $2.2 billion in cost savings this year from canceling the plans.

Sen. Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., said this would "kick nearly a million Americans off their health insurance." Rep. Jennifer McClellan, D-Va., said this was part of a plot "to inflict death by a thousand cuts" on Obamacare. Former House speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., wrote on social media that "using the false pretext of fighting fraud to strip Americans of their healthcare is as cynical as it is cruel." Media coverage boosted the narrative: "Check Your Mail," said the New Republic. "JD Vance Might Have Canceled Your Health Insurance."

The government said anyone whose plan was mistakenly canceled could call, and it would be restored. Officials at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services tell us that just 51 of the 760,000 removed enrollees have requested reinstatement. Those 51 accounts have yet to be verified "due to suspicious agent and broker activity, possible impersonations and other red flags warranting further scrutiny," according to a CMS official.

A similar Democratic panic ensued in July, when CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz announced that he would end a Biden-era subsidy for Medicare Part D, which provides drug coverage to seniors.

Taxpayers already shoulder about three-quarters of Part D premiums, but the Biden administration tacked on a bonus subsidy in 2024. The extra money was meant to be temporary. It started when the Inflation Reduction Act capped out-of-pocket costs for Part D plans. Lower out-of-pocket spending usually means higher premiums.

But as the 2024 election approached, the Biden administration didn't want premiums to jump. So it created a new across-the-board subsidy for all enrollees through a "voluntary demonstration program" – a model meant to test new policies on a narrow population – to pay insurers to keep premiums artificially low. Then, a few months ago, the Trump administration did the unthinkable: It declared that a temporary subsidy would, indeed, be temporary.

The opposition leaped into action. "Trump doubled prescription drug costs for millions of seniors by making cuts to Medicare drug plans," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., in a floor speech. "Can Trump get any more heartless?" New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, D, called the move "cruel."

ABC News said the lapsing subsidy "is so vital for so many seniors." But how vital? Without the subsidy, Part D monthly premiums next year will increase on average by less than a dollar. That's great news, and it turns out that premiums, when adjusted for inflation, were already coming down on their own. That made the extra subsidy an unnecessary payout to insurers.

Even as government has taken over more of healthcare, competition for Part D plans remains strong. That incentivized insurers to find ways to lower premiums. Since these companies had to jockey for customers, they fought harder to negotiate lower drug prices. That led to lower costs overall. Even now, the government's contribution to these plans remains more generous than before the IRA expansion.

Fourteen years ago, progressives blasted entitlement reform proposals as the equivalent of pushing granny off a cliff. Here's hoping nobody dusts off granny's wheelchair for another attack ad. The administration's efforts to reduce costs and combat fraud look promising.