

North Dakota – “a state of emergency”

Schools impacted by an influx of students due to the oil boom are in a state of emergency. With an estimated 3000 new students next year, schools will need immediate help. School additions and new buildings are needed, and more staff will be necessary for both regular and special education. Massive numbers of children with IEP's are on the horizon, and incorrigible roads make buses antique far too soon. Transportation assistance will be obligatory.

The usual 12% increase limitation on budgets hampers much of what schools need to do when they plan budgets during an emergency, and it's almost impossible to reach the cap of 110 mills when property is appreciating in excess of 20%. Waivers for the 110 mill cap and the 12% clause are imminent.

These items plus the one year delay of foundation aide for enrollment increases make schools handicapped when dealing with the volume of incoming oil producing children. In the last couple of years, mostly adult males have come to produce oil because of limited housing. Man camps were the housing choice of the day. With the advent of more housing in Northwest North Dakota, the kids will now come in droves. Williston anticipates almost 1200 new students for 2012-2013; over 2000 housing permits have been granted. New District 8, a small rural graded elementary school district near Williston, could have 200 new students.

In short, oil patch schools are in need of state assistance immediately. With about seven million dollars per day going into the state coffers thankfully there is money available. If the emergency clause would be used, schools could get construction started and prepare for the influx. Without it, schools will have too little too late. It takes about two years to do a building project.

The following categories demonstrate basic needs to be considered during this emergency:

1. Building Needs – 100 million dollars.

A state school facilities commission similar to what Wyoming has used in the past is a necessity. Schools could submit proposals similar to what is

done for federal installations with impact aide needs such as the Minot Air Force Base. The proposals could be prioritized and addressed over time with annual allocations. Schools outside of the oil patch could also benefit if they had urgent building needs.

2. Staffing Needs – 30 million dollars.

Schools should be eligible for new staff assistance at a rate of one new staff member for every 25 new students. A school's base salary plus 30% for benefits could be used as a guide for payment. Schools could hire whomever they wanted, but additional expenses would be picked up locally. Ten million dollars should also be set aside for classified and/or specialist staffing needs.

3. Rapid Growth Grants --- 25 million dollars. These grants should be continued and broadened to include schools with small growth as a result of movement of oil drilling. This should come out of general funds to allow for non-oil-patch schools to benefit if their enrollment increases.

4. Gross Production Tax Dollars --- It would make sense to create a new pool of 100 million dollars just for schools, and let the present Gross Production dollars be facilitated by counties and cities; their infrastructure is in horrible condition. This would avoid the need to adjust the formula, yet allow schools to participate in the merits of local drilling, and it would not pit different infrastructure entities against each other.

5. Bus & Mechanical Transportation Grants – 8.5 million dollars for buses and drivers. This money should be set aside for new buses and new driver expenses. (75 buses and drivers)

A formula of 1 new bus for every 40 new children could dictate when new buses are necessary. This could be prioritized and adjudicated.

Additional funds should be set aside for transportation mechanical needs, equipment, and storage -- 6 million dollars per year for a minimum of three years.

6. Special Education Dollars --- 12 million dollars. Additional state funding should be allocated to assist with incoming high needs children. Categories such as autism and emotionally disturbed are on a rapid increase.
7. Equipment Needs – 25 million dollars. Data from Education Commission's Adequacy Study could be used to assist schools with equipment needs. Such things as desks, books, technology equipment, and room supplies become paramount with the addition of 3000 new students.
8. Teacher Housing – 6 million dollars. Approximately 150 new teachers will need housing next year. They can't afford scarce, expensive rentals. Unfortunately schools are going to be forced into becoming landlords. They will need assistance with staff housing.

All of the above items should be periodically reviewable and subject to the continual production of oil which makes this funding both necessary and justifiable. The source of the revenue should be left in the hands of state officials, but sources such as the designation of days of royalty and production payments, emergency funding via the Industrial Commission, and a sales tax made available to oil impacted schools are all possibilities.