

Vote ‘no’ on Proposition 119, a slippery slope

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As anxious skiers await the snow to cover the beautiful slopes of Summit County, voters should beware of a dangerous and deceptive slippery slope that hides in their ballots this November. Proposition 119 would create a new independently run government agency to address “student learning loss,” with an administrative budget twice the size of Colorado’s Department of Education.

To fund this new government bureaucracy, the proponents of this scheme deceive voters to believe an increase in taxes on the sale of marijuana would pay for out-of-school programs to address student “learning loss.” The truth is that millions of dollars would also be diverted from public school funding annually to the Learning Enrichment and Academic Progress program the proposition would create, resulting in a loss of nearly a billion dollars in the next decade to our schools. Proposition 119 threatens to further destabilize public education funding in Colorado. Claiming to help our students by stealing money from their schools is wrong and sinister.

Another avalanche of deception is the way our taxes would be used. Since 2015, the Colorado Department of Education has been managing a portion of marijuana taxes to fund grant programs for public schools. If the voters choose to collect additional taxes from marijuana sales, those new monies should be sent to the state education department with built-in oversight, accountability and transparency — not to a new, competing, profit-making bureaucracy to line the pockets of investors. By creating another government agency to do what the Colorado Department of Education should and can do is unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

The wealthy millionaires supporting Proposition 119 don’t want us to see the forest through the trees, so let’s shed some light. The new agency, with its unelected board, would operate independently, with administrative costs yet unknown. The board would have the sole power to choose, certify and contract with private education companies or online profiteers and set the salaries for their employees. With no state input, oversight or accountability, the appointed governing board would develop its own criteria for selection of providers. Proposition 119 offers no guarantee that providers would be authorized in all areas of the state, meaning that rural areas like Summit County would likely have none.

To add another layer of deception, unscrupulous behavior of private providers or the self-serving actions of the board would be shielded from any lawsuit. A setup like this is ripe for fraud, corruption and misuse of taxpayer dollars.

To address the issue of interrupted learning, nearly \$510 million of the latest round of federal coronavirus relief funds was given directly to the Colorado Department of Education, then distributed to each school district to use in a way that meets the unique needs of their school community. Some of those districts are hiring more teachers to lower class sizes, adding a counselor, reinstating programs that were cut, buying more computers or improving their internet access. Decisions on how to use those monies are being made by local school boards and professional educators, not by businessmen in a downtown Denver boardroom.

At the state level, the Colorado Legislature passed and funded four major bills this year to address “learning loss.” These bills will provide extended learning opportunities and supplemental education high-impact tutoring programs for our most needy students.

We all agree that students have struggled with learning during the pandemic. Returning to some sort of normalcy is important for all students not only academically but socially and emotionally. However, the well-funded campaign supporting Proposition 119 will play on our emotions, lie about the impact on public schools and manipulate the rules for their personal gain.

To create a new big-government agency with a never-ending diversion of public school funds to private providers is reckless, unnecessary and a slippery slope. Vote “no” on Proposition 119.



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Judy Solano is a retired elementary teacher, a former Colorado state representative and vice chair of the House Education Committee, and a member of the Early Childhood Commission. She is the current chair of Advocates for Public Education Policy, a nonprofit formed to protect public education.