

BOULDER COUNTY BUSINESS REPORT

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Leaders: Education key part of solving problem of struggling economy

By David Clucas

BOULDER - In a struggling economy, communities should look to education as a major part of the solution, local business and political leaders said at a recent Impact on Education Business Leadership Forum.

The breakfast event at the Millennium Harvest House hotel in Boulder on Oct. 24 featured a keynote address by Democrat Colorado Speaker of the House Andrew Romanoff, who said the state needs to increase its education funding.

"We're heading in the wrong direction in funding for Colorado education and people are passing us up," Romanoff. He said the state ranked 43rd in the United States for dollars spent per pupil.

"I wish in Colorado we could have a discussion about 21st century schools, but at this point, I think most superintendents would be happy if we at least give them 20th century schools," Romanoff said.

Romanoff urged the crowd of about 75 people to back Amendment 59 this election. The measure would allow Colorado to shift its tax revenue surpluses to education funding, rather than rebating the surpluses back to citizens via the Tax payer Bill of Rights.

"Allowing the state to save money when times are good is important - because when times are tough, that's when people need the most education and help," Romanoff said.

Boulder Chamber of Commerce President Susan Graf, Wells Fargo Boulder Market President Pat O'Brien, Western Disposal President Gary Horton and Impact on Education President Francie Anhut also spoke at the event, highlighting the connection between good education and a good economy.

"When we meet with businesses who want to locate to Boulder, the first thing they ask about the community is education," Graf said. Businesses want a good educated work force to choose from, but also a good education for their employees' families, she said.

Graf said education also produces direct economic benefits in the Boulder Valley such as attracting federal grants and jobs via the University of Colorado and the federal science laboratories.

Anhut said education needs to be looked at on a complete scale from pre-school to college.

"By under-funding education, people at the different levels of education will just focus on their piece of the pie," she said. "We have to fund education properly from start to finish. As you move along, it gets more expensive to go back and remediate students."

O'Brien and Horton spoke to how their businesses are getting involved with education. At Wells Fargo, O'Brien said \$1.1 million, or one-third of the bank's charitable giving in Colorado, goes to state education efforts. He said the Wells Fargo also regularly holds financial education sessions at the bank for all ages.

Horton said education is playing a larger role in his waste disposal business, as technologies become a bigger part of the job. He said people have a misconception of garbage men as less educated, but in reality they are well educated in the new technologies that are driving improvements and efficiencies in the field.

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