



For Immediate Release
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UNION MEMBERS, RESIDENTS WARN SCHOOL OFFICIALS NOT TO AWARD MENDOTA HEIGHTS SCHOOL CONTRACTS TO PROBLEM CONTRACTORS

Coalition says past child labor, performance should disqualify Derau, Ebert

Saint Paul, Mn (August 3, 2015)- Union members and concerned residents of Independent School District 197 (West St. Paul – Mendota Heights – Eagan) announced today their plan to attend a scheduled 6:00 p.m. “public testimony session” and 7:00 p.m. regular school board meeting today to urge officials not to award construction contracts to companies the coalition says are unfit to work in area schools.

The organizations planning to attend tonight’s meeting at Mendota Heights City Hall include the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), members of the St. Paul Building and Construction Trades, and the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation.

Derau Construction and Ebert Construction, the contractors at issue, submitted apparent low bids last week for renovations at Somerset and Mendota elementary schools in Mendota Heights. But the coalition contends that Derau and Ebert have performed poorly in the past, and allowed workers – in one instance a child – to be put in harm’s way.

Derau Construction generated headlines in last summer when a young 13 or 14 year-old boy was discovered performing dangerous work without safety equipment on a local school construction project. The coalition says Derau has continued the pattern by employing a subcontractor with multiple convictions, including violation of a domestic protection order, according to court records.

Ebert Construction was featured in a 2011 news exposé concerning a contract that was terminated by MnDOT when the project fell far behind schedule and went over budget. The coalition says it has found additional evidence of apparent defects, delays, and use of hardball tactics on recent Ebert school and other public works construction projects.

Brian Brunette, a union member with school-age children who lives in Mendota Heights, is deeply disturbed at the thought of Derau or Ebert working in area schools.

“It just makes me sick,” says Brunette. “I voted for the last school referendum. I put a sign in my yard. I can’t believe the district would give our money to these characters. Our kids deserve better.”

Mike Wilde, Executive Director of the Fair Contracting Foundation of Minnesota, has examined state procurement law and concludes that school districts and municipalities have discretion when it comes to setting standards and rejecting bids from non-responsible contractors.

“School boards have the legal authority to reject a bid from a problem contractor,” says Wilde. “The question is whether the board is willing to use it. When entering into a large public construction project, the quality of service should be a top consideration. The School District’s discretion should be used when it can avoid problems that have occurred on similar projects.”

Bobby Kasper, President of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, also rejects the argument that school districts should award contracts to problem contractors to avoid lawsuits.

“You can be sued for getting out of bed in the morning, but that’s no excuse for not doing your job,” says Kasper. “If we don’t stand up to contractors that exploit children or do shoddy work, what kind of example are we setting for our kids?”

School Board Hearing at a Glance:

What: West St Paul/Mendota Heights/Eagan School Board Meeting

When: Monday - August 3, 2015, 6 pm public comment followed by 7 pm meeting

Who: Brian Brunette - Mendota Heights resident / LIUNA member

Why: Labor/Community Coalition Warns School Board of Problem Contractors

Where: City of Mendota Heights Council Chambers – 1101 Victoria Curve, Mendota Heights)

Note to editors:

Laborers have been active in monitoring this contractor bid process and are available for interviews in advance of school board meeting or immediately after. To set up an interview contact Robb Leer at 612.701.0608. Click here for contractors work history and more information on [Derau](#) or [Ebert](#).

About Us

Chartered in 1968 by the Laborers International Union of North America, LIUNA, the Laborers District Council of MN and ND and its seven affiliated Local Unions represent about 12,000 workers in Minnesota, North Dakota and Northwestern Wisconsin. For more information check out their websites www.minnesotalaborers.org or www.facebook.com/MinnesotaLaborers.

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