

Friends of EPISD will seek bond support

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By Gustavo Reveles Acosta

The group in charge of selling the \$230 million El Paso Independent School District bond program to voters will be led by four diverse co-chairs who hope to attract support for the May 12 referendum.

The Friends of the EPISD Bond political action committee, which will have its first official meeting Monday, introduced its four co-chairs Friday during a ceremony at the Greater Chamber of Commerce.

“This is a diverse group because we want the input of many people to play a part in getting the information out to the public,” said one of them, a former Fort Bliss commander, retired Maj. Gen. Jim Maloney. “It’s not just a military thing. We need the bond to deal with many aspects of the district.”

The three other chairs are Al Velarde, executive director of the Child Crisis Center; Josie Trejo, government solutions representative for Cingular; and Cecilia Levine, president of MFI International.

Because school district employees are prohibited by law from publicly campaigning in favor of the bond referendum, administrators are relying on the committee to launch and organize events to promote the “yes” vote.

“The promise is we can make as a district is that we will be good with any money voters approve...we will ensure that the money is spent appropriately,” EPISD Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia said. “We will continue to work with stakeholders to guarantee this.”

Most of the \$230 million would be used to build seven new campuses, to rebuild the aging Alamo Elementary School and to build major classroom additions to nine existing schools.

The bond money would take care of the expected influx of about 10,000 military students who will arrive in El Paso by 2011.

If approved, the bond would add a maximum of 7.5 cents to the current tax rate. That would add \$75 to the annual school-tax bill on a home with a taxable valuation of \$100,000.

Maloney said that the committee has not yet outlined its campaign strategy, but that it will probably include a \$150,000 advertising campaign.

“We have gone to breakfast meetings, Rotary meetings...basically any meeting that will have us,” EPISD board President Lisa Colquitt-Muñoz said. “We want to get out there

and spread the word of what the need is and give people the proper information they'll need to make a decision.”