

editorial opinion

Give your kids a chance, approve April 6 millage

Education in the Farmington area stands at a crossroad.

Which direction it takes depends on how residents vote in the April 6 millage renewal election. Frankly, if the four-mill renewal is defeated, the school district will be in disastrous shape. Right off the top, the schools will lose \$1.9 million. Hundreds of teachers would be laid off and programs would be cut.

The district is in such bad financial shape now that even if the millage renewal passes, more than 80 teachers are being laid off and the administrative staff is being pared down.

Unfortunately, millages are confusing to residents. Some fear the concept, others resent it. Most don't exactly understand what it means.

In this election, the facts are simple. If voters turn down the renewal, your kids, the future of your community is going to suffer a horrible blow.

Much of school district financing is through state aid. Because the state is mandated to balance its budget, it has cut deeply into school funding.

School board trustees and administrators have been left with a frustrating task—to provide a quality education with fewer and fewer funds available each year. Making the job even more frustrating is the inflationary spiral which has plagued us all.

Costs are going up, funds are disappearing. The new single business tax also is taking its toll. As a result of the new law, personal business inventories have been removed from the tax rolls for 1976. Under the law the district's state equalized valuation (SEV) has been cut by \$6,813,160.

Another added burden is Section 143 of the state aid act. It allows the district to recover some of the funds lost through the single business tax—if the district levies at least the same amount of operating mills it levied for the previous year.

A footnote:

Who's running Wayne County? Who's accountable to the voters? The following are excerpts from a Detroit News story of March 24:

(Headline) "Labor's choices to fill top county board positions."

(Story) "He won't be named chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners until a week from tomorrow, but Commissioner John Barr of Dearborn Heights is a shoo-in for the post."

Last week Wayne County labor union leaders met and decided to back Barr.

Backing by labor in Wayne County's government is tantamount to "commitment." But his (Commissioner Samuel Turner's) candidacy was turned down by union leaders because he could not promise to spend his full time on the job."

Query: Since voters no longer run Wayne County government (if they ever did), if they not forget about electing county officers and allow all voters to ballot on the union's executive board—that's where the decisions are made.

Don't understand inflation? Well, it's an election year

A youngster went up to a wise old man and asked him to explain a few things about economics.

The old man, obviously pleased at being sought out, asked what the child didn't understand.

Well, the young chap didn't understand inflation.

The sage smiled and explained that this occurs when there is more money available than products, so that under the law of supply and demand, prices on the products rise.

And the boy then asked what causes inflation.

THE OLD MAN said that efficiency in business could cause it, because if business produces a product for less but charges the same price for it, the business would have more money available. However, this situation never lasts too long, because soon workers demand higher pay.

Loose credit can produce inflation because it puts more money into buyers' hands.

But the biggest causes of inflation are higher wages and government spending.

Higher wages because workers can buy more, and if the number of products doesn't keep up, it will mean more demand with no increase in supply, and therefore higher prices.

THE BIGGEST CAUSE, though, is deficit spending by governments. That is, spending more money than can be collected through taxes and other assessments. To get more money, the governments must borrow or sell bonds.

The district is far beyond the point of cutting frills to meet necessary expenses. What will be cut are necessary programs essential to a good education for your children.

In reality the school board should be asking for additional millage, but they have opted instead to try to get by for the near future. Because it is just a renewal, area residents' tax rates would remain the same as they are paying this year.

So, it's up to you to go out and support quality education on April 6. The decision is yours. Hopefully, Farmington area residents will have the wisdom to approve the renewal.

STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

As MEA gets silly

Local school bargainers make sense

News stories on the same subject have a way of popping at the same, as often as not pointing to two contradictory conclusions. Last week was no exception.

The subject was education for our kids. In the first story, after a seven month delay, the Livonia Education Association last Tuesday ratified a two year contract with the school board. Final agreement prevented a strike set for this Friday, and almost certainly saved a 17.3-mill school tax renewal scheduled for next Monday. Agreement came after an all-night bargaining session at which wage increases and class size compromises were worked out and a hassle over a board demand to change insurance carriers was referred to binding arbitration.

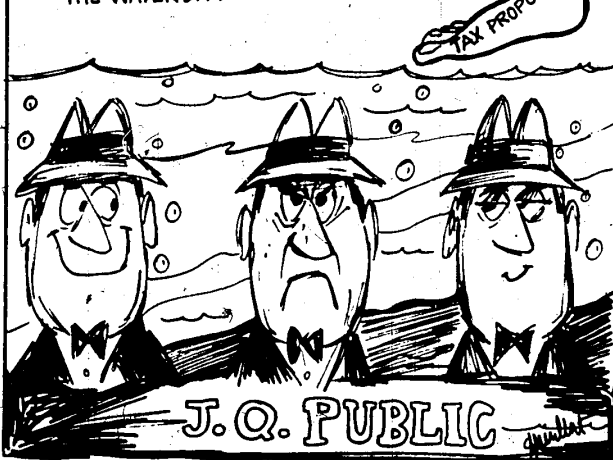
In the second story, the Michigan Education Association, the union which represents 84 per cent of the state's public school teachers, called last Tuesday for passage of a bill which would empower the state to increase or decrease personal income taxes in mid year to guarantee funding of local school districts.

The MEA spokesman who made the proposal at a press conference said the funding guarantee would apply only to the education portion of the state budget; he took "no position" on whether a similar guarantee should cover other state services.

THE MIND reels at the differing points of view expressed by the protagonists in these two stories.

In the Livonia settlement, both the Livonia Education Association and the school board recognized that the consequences of a teacher strike—loss of the millage renewal followed by whole-sale layoffs and half day school for the kids—

IT'S ALWAYS BEST TO TEST THE WATERS...



Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER



would be much worse for both sides than getting their way in the negotiations. So a sensible compromise was reached.

Both George Garver and the leadership of the LEA stressed privately that their main concern was to spare the community the terribly divisive atmosphere that an earlier strike in Garden City has produced.

Their joint efforts to reach settlement deserve praise for leadership and emulation in other school contract negotiations that will be taking place in other suburban districts this fall.

THE MEA proposal, however, is an entirely different kettle of fish.

In effect, the MEA is urging that decisions on the level of school taxes be taken out of the hands of local taxpayers and placed in the legislature. The MEA says that it is trying by its proposal to avoid the very real chaos that is created in local school systems when the state slashes its contributions to local districts in the middle of the year.

This is no doubt true, but the MEA is also trying to guarantee that no teachers will ever be laid off when times are tough and school districts have to cut costs. This is just plain selfish, and the legislators I have talked to about it say it doesn't have a snowball's chance in hell of passage.

WHAT IS interesting about the divergent attitudes of responsibility and selfishness which lie be-

hind these two news stories is the difference between local involvement and state control.

The real reason the Livonia teachers and school board got together is that they both are embedded in the local community. As a result, they both have a lively appreciation of the kind of citizen reaction that a selfish strike would bring. It was their knowledge of local citizen attitudes which brought them together at the end.

The MEA, on the other hand, by its very nature must represent an interest group, the teachers. As its office is located in Lansing and as the group that can do more to advance the interests of its members than any other is the state legislature, the MEA is interested in attitudes of legislators. It is essentially unconcerned with the attitudes of the individual citizens. Hence it can hold a (poorly attended) press conference to announce a plan that may be perfectly reasonable to legislators but sounds to the individual homeowner like thinly disguised, arrogant selfishness.

THE PROBLEM that is traditionally raised about contract negotiations between public employees (teachers, policemen, bus drivers, etc.) and governmental authorities (school boards, cities, etc.) is that the individual members of the public are only very indirectly represented at the bargaining table.

In the Livonia case, even though the public was only indirectly present during bargaining, knowledge of attitudes of local people was the key factor leading to settlement. In the rarefied atmosphere of Lansing, on the other hand, where individual citizen attitudes do not count for much, the MEA had no hesitation about going ahead with a fairly silly proposal.

What all this means to me is that even though we may not have a good solution to the problems of bargaining with public employees, it is clear that such bargaining is most successful on the local level.

The transit tax uproar

Get ready for an unearthly howl to erupt at 10 a.m. Monday, April 12. The State Senate highways and transportation committee will conduct a public hearing in the City-County Building, Detroit, on that proposed real estate transfer tax to build a rapid transit system.

You'll recall that several months ago, Gov. Milliken proposed an auto registration fee of about \$10 per vehicle that would raise the \$25 million annually to build a transit system.

The auto tax would have applied in the three counties which make up what is legally known as "metropolitan Detroit"—Wayne, Oakland and Macomb. The idea ran into a buzz-saw of opposition, especially in Oakland County, and Sen. John Bowman (D-Roseville) bottled it up in his taxation committee.

SO NEXT THE POWERS in Lansing came up with the idea of a property transfer tax—something invisible that most of us wouldn't see every day of the week or even once a year—and it would work like this:

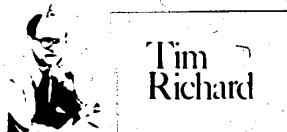
Now when you sell your house, you pay a barely noticeable transfer tax of 0.1 per cent; that's one-tenth of one per cent in plain words. The new plan, which Sen. David Plawewski (D-Deaerborn Heights) was brave enough to put his name on, would raise that tax to 1.1 per cent. Again, you would pay it only when you sold your property, and it would affect only Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

REALTORS and homeowners are reacting predictably.

Why sock three counties for a transit system that will benefit only Detroit? Why sock only homeowners? Why sock people who are mobile? Aren't those mobile people our young families, and isn't it frightfully unfair to zap them?

Look at it this way: A young family scrapes up a 10 per cent down payment for a home; then circumstances—perhaps a job transfer, perhaps triplets—force them to move. They pay seven per cent to a Realtor to sell the house and 1.1 per cent for public transportation, for a total of 8.1 per cent, and more than four-fifths of their equity is wiped out.

Good-bye, middle class!



That's what you'll be hearing the morning of April 12.

SEN. BOWMAN, the aforementioned chairman of the bypassed taxation committee, is fairly seething with rage.

He's writing a bill to wipe out regional government systems. He's threatening that Macomb County will withdraw from the SEMTA (South-eastern Michigan Transportation Authority) and; He's thundering that his fellow senators are setting "a rather dangerous precedent" by bypassing his committee and sending it to the highways and transportation committee, where it might get more favorable treatment.

Sen. Arthur Cartwright (D-Detroit), chairman of the highways and transportation committee, replied coolly.

"We are not going to bottle up any bill, and there are broad implications in this transportation package. Two things I don't like are taxes and sauerkraut. But we will be looking at alternatives, hoping to come up with an acceptable compromise."

"This package is to deal with people coming 25 to 30 miles into the city each morning . . . from Ann Arbor, Pontiac, Birmingham, Flint. We must face this issue sooner or later."

"If we can come up with a viable alternative to the direct real estate transfer tax or the \$10 license plate tax, then you will probably get a bill reported out."

As I hear the man, Sen. Cartwright is saying it's one thing to squawk against the property transfer tax, but if you do, you'd better be prepared to offer a constructive alternative that will bring the cause of public transportation \$25 million a year.

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