

Opinion

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Take heed Don't ignore campaign

MORE THAN a century ago, Horace Mann pushed passionately for public support and control of the steadily expanding network of American schools.

The Massachusetts native also made an impassioned pitch for better-trained teachers and aroused community interest for improving the basic curriculum.

In Mann's time, with public education in its infancy and farming the leading source of jobs, the rudiments of learning often were limited to reading, writing and arithmetic.

To achieve both professional and personal security in today's fiercely competitive world, however, a more varied and rigorous educational approach is crucial.

The hitch is that many property owners are struggling to meet relentless tax demands.

Still, a public financial commitment, which Mann so eloquently championed, continues to be the strongest insurance against a downturn in educational quality.

WITHIN THIS backdrop — and at a time when the Legislature is taking a long look at equalized school funding, perhaps by channeling some locally raised dollars to more-needy districts — Farmington Public Schools voters soon will fill two board of education seats.

On Monday, June 9, voters will fill two four-year terms from among two-term incumbents Janice Rolnick and R. Jack Inch and first-time challenger Paul Blizman.

With three well-qualified contenders, it's shaping up to be a horse race with a potential photo finish.

Incumbency won't mean automatic victory — as well it shouldn't. Just as it's good for an incumbent to be challenged, it's even better for an incumbent to face a strong challenge. More of what people need to know to cast an informed vote tends to get out into the open then.

In recent Observer interviews, the three candidates tackled a variety of issues and turned the spotlight on an array of areas worthy of public scrutiny.

SO LISTEN up:

A background investigator and former teacher, Rolnick says about the Farmington Public Schools' caliber of education: "My philosophy is not, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' I think everything can be improved."

Headly and articulate, she calls for wider teaching of thinking skills, introducing foreign language in the elementary and toughening graduation requirements for English.

She also calls for an expanded gifted education program, academically oriented cocurricular activities like a his-

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tory club and more emphasis on science in the elementaries.

She has a provoking reaction to the state of the district's facilities: "So much needs to be done. During the energy crunch, we went overboard. We did a lot of things to improve energy efficiency, but which made our buildings ugly and depressing. That's a terrible atmosphere for learning."

INCH, WHOSE easygoing demeanor belies his role as chairman of economics and political science at Oakland Community College, says: "I am what I seem to be — very straightforward, a balanced wheel." And that seems to be a fair self-assessment.

If re-elected, he says he'd push for inspiring underachievers, making social studies more relevant and assuring computer application literacy.

Blizman, an attorney and a former juvenile social worker, says he has no hidden agenda for running. "I've been interested in education as a consumer, parent and observer — the crises, the fads, the new directions. And I thought I could make a contribution."

He's looking to halt deterioration of school buildings, strengthen vocational education, distinguish the middle schools from the senior highs and encourage teacher recruitment in light of sweeter retirement incentives.

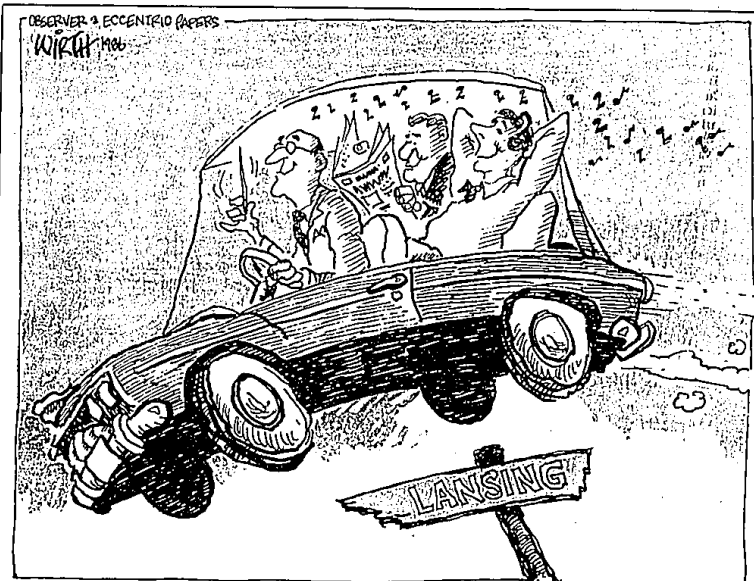
"We tend to be very self-satisfied," he says. "But I don't know why we should be second to anybody with the resources we've got."

BETWEEN NOW and Election Day, study up. Know who you are voting for, and why. Don't hesitate to ask the candidates pointed questions. It's your duty to ask them and it's their obligation to answer them.

Meanwhile, let's make sure the rigors of campaigning don't unwittingly overshadow those most deserving of the public's eye — the young people in the classrooms.

The entire community can't help but be the big winner when the interests of its kids are truly at heart.

— Bob Sklar



Coping with a long drive

DRIVING TO Lansing can be dead time. From the western suburbs, the trip is 60 to 90 minutes.

But lots of people make it each week — legislators, lobbyists, local officials, newspeople.

The scenery is farmland, though once I spotted three deer near Fowlerville. Just seeing deer makes my day.

Some folks abhor the trip. Don Koivisto, a state representative from the western Upper Peninsula, announced he will leave the Legislature after three terms because he wants more time with his four kids, aged 6-13. He spends all week in Lansing, commuting on weekends.

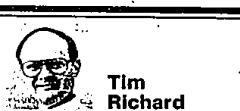
Koivisto used to fly during his first term, but the costs grew prohibitive. Then he drove the 1,000-mile round trip each week, but had one serious car accident and several close calls. He's calling it quits.

MOST SUBURBANITES don't mind the drive.

"I think," said Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham. "I listen to tapes — informational tapes, music. If I'm with somebody, we talk."

Got a telephone? No, said Miller. "I have more time to myself. I have an apartment up here and am up here most of the time."

Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, says,



Tim Richard

"I'm a big fan of NPR (National Public Radio). You can get news for 1½ hours. It's like reading the paper over the airways. It's comprehensive, and there's variety."

"If I had a tape player, I'd get into books on cassettes," he said.

Staff members from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments have a stock of tapes — stress, management and the like, said Donn Shelton, information chief.

"IT WAS KILLING," Rep. William Keith said of the drive he used to make daily.

"Now I have a house here and in Garden City. My wife is with the Michigan Dental Association (in Lansing). But I'm back in Garden City and Inghram two or three nights a week for events."

"I have a cassette player and listen to tapes — talking books, investment property management, time management, Broadway hits. But not the news — it has a tendency to lull my thinking process."

Tom Brown, retired state legislator from Westland, drives to Lansing two or three times a week to lobby for the Michigan Townships Association. He carries a tape recorder to dictate notes, ideas and memos.

CARL PURSELL, a state senator for six years before moving up to Congress, used to stay in Lansing overnight until one of his hockey-loving sons said, "Dad, I liked it better when you weren't a senator."

Immediately, Pursell became a daily commuter.

Jim Herrington, WXYZ-TV newsman in Southfield, travels with a crew in a van, and someone else usually drives. "I get a lot of reading in," said Herrington, who is unusually well read for a broadcaster.

I used to dislike the trip until I ordered FM radio in my '86 Dodge and was delighted to find it was stereo with four speakers.

A classical music fan can have an orgy listening to WQRS up to Brighton and then Michigan State's WKAR the rest of the way to the capital. I've even taken to carrying a baton to conduct the symphonic works.

Sometimes other drivers' speeding by see me waving the baton and stare at me as if I were crazy. I stare right back as if I weren't.



A time for peace, prayer

ON MONDAY, Memorial Day will be observed throughout most of the United States. A few Southern states are still reluctant to celebrate a day that was instituted in 1868 by the president of the Grand Army of the Republic to commemorate the deaths of those who had died in the Civil War.

Memorial Day started off as Decoration Day when Gen. John A. Logan declared that May 30 would be a day to "decorate with flowers the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion."

The custom of placing flowers on the graves of those who died in the Civil War started two years earlier in Waterloo, N.Y.

AFTER WORLD War I, Congress set aside the day to honor the dead of all American wars. The most-solemn ceremony conducted on Memorial Day is the placing of a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.

Until 1971, Memorial Day was May 30. Congress changed the traditional observance to the fourth Monday in May in deference to the political clout of federal employees who wanted a long weekend rather than a day off at some point during the week.

Although some cities regularly con-

duct Memorial Day parades, the holiday has tended to become little more than a day off from work, a day to do the annual garage cleaning, or get caught up on the yard work.

YET, THERE have been enough reminders in recent years to prompt us all to give pause and to consider what we have lost in our often desperate struggle to keep ours a country of freedom and opportunity, and to keep the world free of governmental enslavement and barbaric destruction.

The deaths of young soldiers lose their impact on our consciousness over time, but the statistics are still numbing. The country, North and South, lost 500,000 men in the Civil War to preserve the union. The United States lost 105,000 in World War I; 400,000 in World War II; 50,000 in the Korean War; and 60,000 in Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of others were maimed in body and spirit in these travails.

And ours is not the only country to lose. The Soviet Union, our bitter enemy in the never-ending struggle for strategic gain and political dominance, should know well the cost of war. More than 16 million Soviets died in World War II alone.

WE TEETER at the brink once again. The world is full of wars and

threats of wars. Israel, our ally, stands at the center of a Middle East tinderbox that could explode at any moment.

The U.S. has embarked on a new policy of using military strength in an effort to make strategic gains. The chance of a meaningful accord on arms reductions seems more and more remote.

And over the world hangs the cloud of Chernobyl. While the radioactivity let loose by the explosion at the Russian nuclear factory may not be devastating to our hemisphere, there is a pall hanging over us that will not go away; that is the reminder of the horrifying and tremendous power that can be unleashed through nuclear devices.

Driving through our peaceful neighborhoods and tree-lined streets on Memorial Day, seeing our neighbors out enjoying the sun, it will be hard to imagine that anything could blast beyond recognition our tranquil communities or our peaceful lives.

Yet, there is the stark evidence behind us — the millions of war dead, the history of war, the miscalculations and the plots and schemes which led to continents engulfed in war. And now, also, Chernobyl.

Memorial Day should be a day to stop and think and to dedicate ourselves once again to peace and prayer.