

Opinion

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Do care about the classroom

SCHOOLS OUT for the summer. But the business of education goes on at the little building atop the Shawwassee Road hill.

With a \$50 million budget and 1,000 employees, Farmington Public Schools rivals a good-sized corporation. There should be no mistake about the amount of responsibility and authority — and the resulting extent of accountability — that lies with the seven-member board of education.

Given that, it's shocking that only 2 percent of the registered voters cared enough about the district to vote in the June 9 school board election.

Oh, sure. You could attribute the low turnout to satisfaction with the current board. But we prefer to think voter apathy — read that laziness — was the actual reason. To go to the polls demands an effort, even though you'd probably be in and out within 10 minutes.

And if ever the public should care about what's going on in the 10,300-student district, it's now!

CONSIDER THAT in the past three years, four new faces have joined the school board. A new superintendent and deputy superintendent have just been named. And student overcrowding has sparked discussion about whether a new elementary is needed in western Farmington Hills.

Consider, too, that the Legislature is taking a long look at equalized school funding, perhaps by channeling some locally raised dollars to more-needy districts.

What's more, questions remain about toughening graduation requirements, introducing foreign language in the elementary, expanding gifted education, improving vocational education, halting building deterioration and re-emphasizing elementary science.

And there are ever-present concerns about computer application literacy, teacher competency and recruitment,

With a \$50 million budget and 1,000 employees, Farmington Public Schools rivals a good-sized corporation.

staff development, curriculum development and student ethnic needs.

Just last week, a board-appointed task force unveiled four reports projecting the district's future and what should be done to meet tomorrow's challenges. It's pointed, statistic-packed reading. The gist is that we should prepare for the future, not merely react to it.

BLUNTLY PUT, educators and residents alike must stoke their imaginations and call on their creativity — not just coast countless conclusions out of another layer of bureaucracy and be lulled into a sense of accomplishment.

Still, think what's going on in the schools is piddling?

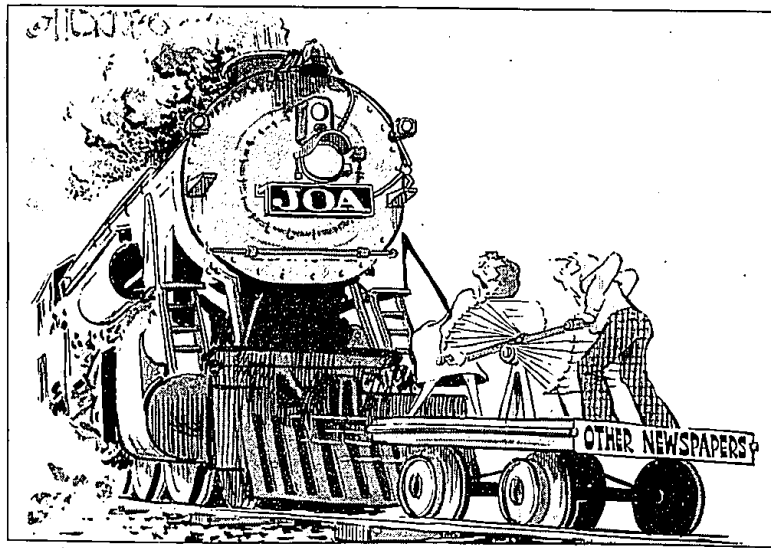
Bentley Community Schools near Flint is considering a plan that would require students interested in any co-curricular activity — particularly athletics — to first be tested for drugs.

The American Civil Liberties Union has gone on record challenging the constitutionality of such a requirement. And Farmington school trustees have not even raised the issue, at least publicly.

But mere mention of it elsewhere underscores that controversy is a natural extension of a school district's decision-making.

To not care about what goes on behind the walls of Farmington Public Schools' Lewis Schulman Administrative Center is to not give a darn about the bedrock of this community's future — its young people.

— Bob Sklar



Hearings needed on JOA

REMEMBER JUNE 30. It will be one of the most important deadline days ever for Detroit-area newspapers, their readers and advertisers.

That Monday in June will be the deadline for all concerned residents to comment on the Detroit News and Detroit Free Press proposed Joint Operating Agreement.

A JOA is allowed under the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970. The act stipulates that two newspapers may enter into a JOA if the U.S. Attorney General determines that one is a "failing newspaper." Currently, newspapers in 21 markets operate under this condition.

THE MAJORITY of joint operations are part of large newspaper companies. The group with the largest number is Scripps Howard with eight, followed by Gannett with seven. Knight-Ridder has three. Gannett bought the Detroit News earlier this year. Knight-Ridder owns the Free Press.

We believe it is essential that all interested parties have their say in this decision, which will set the tone for how newspapers operate in the community for the next 100 years.

Who is an interested party?

- Small communities, often suburbs, that exist in the minds of large daily newspapers as sources of feature stories but not as individual thriving communities.

- Advertisers, who have benefited from competition keeping advertising rates low and who may face steep increases in advertising costs under a JOA.

- Readers, who suspect that newspapers working for the same business

We believe it is essential that all interested parties have their say in this decision, which will set the tone for how newspapers operate in the community for the next 100 years. And everyone who reads or advertises in a Detroit area newspaper is an interested party.

purpose may not be editorially independent.

You may be in favor of a JOA. You may be opposed. Either way, you have an opportunity to tell the government how you feel about the issue.

ONE THING is clear, however, a public hearing on the JOA isn't guaranteed. It is up to us — readers and advertisers, union members and competing newspapers in the area — to demand that we have our day to speak on this issue.

The News and the Free Press have their story to tell. And, indeed, have told us all. They, too, have been to Washington, D.C., to tell the appropriate officials why they believe a JOA is necessary. But without a public hearing only one view — theirs — will be told.

Many questions are left to be answered about the impact of a JOA. Maybe it would be the best thing for the metro Detroit area. On the other hand it may be the worst. The only way to get a well-rounded answer is to let everyone who wishes to speak on the issue do so.

WE WANT more facts about the JOA. We need to hear more than just one

side, and we need to clarify what up until this time have simply been rumors.

- What effect will a JOA have on advertising rates?

- How many jobs will this cost metro Detroit?

- What is meant by a "failing" newspaper?

- How will the News and the Free Press maintain separate editorial voices?

- Will readers pay more for their newspapers?

- What effect will a JOA have on other publications in this area?

All these issues need to be openly discussed before a JOA is approved. And before the Justice Department decides about the JOA, it should hold hearings to answer these questions.

Those concerned can make their opinions known to the attorney general. Before June 30, write to: Janis Spasato, General Counsel, Justice Management Division, Room 1226, Department of Justice, 10th and Pennsylvania Avenues, NW, Washington, D.C. 20530.

Questions on the JOA can only be fairly considered if open public hearings are held.

— Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Abortion funding — cutoff sure to come

DICK HEADLEE's words from the 1982 campaign came to mind as I headed toward Lansing to cover (again) the Medicaid abortion brawl:

"If you want less of something, you tax it. If you want more of something, you subsidize it."

It seems to be true in Michigan, where the number of abortions performed at the expense of the state's social services budget has grown and grown and grown in the last decade, though the number may be leveling off now at 18,500.

THE SHEER NUMBER of Medicaid abortions is a facet of the issue our lawmakers rarely discuss.

The "pro-life" side says abortion is butchering babies, government shouldn't permit it, and the state shouldn't pay for it for women on welfare.

Yet this side admits that in other states where Medicaid funding has been cut, the number of abortions received by welfare women drops only 25 percent.

The "pro-choice" side says abortion is constitutional, and if rich and middle-class women have the right to abortions, then poor women should have it, too, at state expense.

Then the pro-choice side howls as if the world were ending when lawmakers vote to cut Medicaid abortions. Yet, when they calm down, they too will admit that the number of abortions drops only 25 percent when state funding is cut.

Both sides agree that 75 percent will still manage to obtain abortions.

HOW CAN that be? Two reasons: First, the budget cut would apply only to part of the entire abortion cost, namely the surgical procedure, or so I'm told. The state would still pay for after-care.



Tim Richard

Second, it's only in liberal, middle-class mythology that women on welfare are totally without any other resources except social services payments. In reality, they do find other resources — mothers, other relatives, boyfriends, cash income from the underground economy, nest eggs from good household management. So 75 percent do obtain the resources to pay for the surgery.

WHAT ABOUT the other 25 percent of Medicaid abortions that are no longer performed?

No one seems to have facts — just guesses.

One side guesses that they just have their babies and go on welfare at a much greater cost to the state than an abortion.

Another guess is that maybe Headlee is right: If you stop subsidizing something, maybe you get less of it. Armed with the warning that the state won't pay for abortion surgery, fewer clients get into the position where they need it.

THE DOCTRINAIRE pro-choice needs to think about the consequences.

Fourteen times, a majority in both houses of the Michigan Legislature has produced bills to halt Medicaid abortions. Thirteen times, two governors have vetoed the bills, and the Legislature has fallen short of the two-thirds vote needed for an override.

Sooner or later, the majority will win. And when it does, the results will be numerically small but possibly symbolic.

Drive targets wine coolers



MICHIGAN voters have made it clear they want clean roadsides, clean parks and clean yards.

Ten years ago voters passed a law requiring a deposit on cans and on bottles of beer and soft drinks. The law took effect in 1978 and the amount of litter has been drastically reduced.

But wine coolers are new and aren't covered by the 1978 law. So the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) took action.

MUCC has collected approximately 100,000 of the 243,000 signatures needed to place the expanded bottle law on the November ballot. It would like to collect at least 300,000 signatures and it has only a few days left to finish the job.

A spokeswoman at MUCC's Lansing office said nearly 600,000 petitions still are in circulation.

If you have a petition, get it signed and back to the MUCC by July 1.

Litter is litter. The job is to get wine cooler bottles out of our parks, yards, beaches and roadsides.