

Opinion

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Take heed Redistricting no breeze

WHENEVER RISING enrollment causes overcrowding in a school district, the battle cry often is, "Redistrict!"

Move some students from overcrowded schools to less-crowded ones and thus balance the enrollment.

The problem lies in the concept of redrawing school attendance boundaries.

It's a practice that can strain friendships, break up neighborhoods, cause long bus rides and disrupt learning patterns during a youngster's most impressionable years.

RAPID GROWTH in the western part of the 10,000-student Farmington school district has pushed at least five of the 11 elementaries beyond capacity. Elementary enrollment is projected to rise by as much as 800 by 1991.

Potential solutions include building a new elementary and centralizing kindergarten. Controversy no doubt will dog the task force that will propose overall redistricting for 1988-89. Attacks on motives are as much a part of redistricting as beakers are of chemistry.

Because constant transfers can have a psychological effect on young children, school officials wisely have pledged not to transfer elementary students who already have been moved twice.

AT THE senior high level, a surprising revelation accompanied the school board's redrawing of the attendance boundaries for North Farmington and Harrison to help ease overcrowding at North.

Some West Bloomfield parents admitted buying their homes so their children could go to North, which they perceive as academically superior.

Despite what sales-conscious real estate agents might say, no school attendance boundary is guaranteed — ever. People move, families age, schools close.

Beyond that, Harrison students don't have to take an educational back seat to anyone.

CONSIDER The Michigan Educational Assessment Program scores for 1986-87. Students from Harrison's 20 middle schools, East and Warner, didn't



Bob Sklar

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improve as much in math between the seventh and 10th grades as students from North's main feeder school, Dunkel, but their improvement still was significant.

Harrison was the first Farmington senior high to offer advanced placement classes in math. Eighty-five percent of its graduates attend college. And of this year's 14 Observer Academic All-Stars — chosen from Observerland's 24 high schools — the top achiever is a Harrison student.

No one cares to say it publicly, but the negativism toward Harrison stems as much from social and ethnic differences among residents in the eastern swath of the district as any gripes about academic quality.

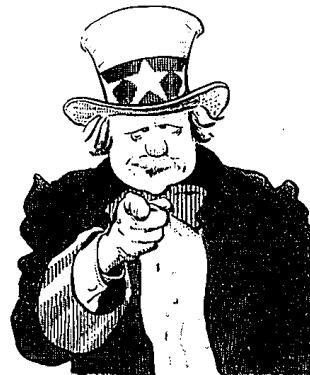
MEANWHILE, FUTURE redistricting in Farmington should go hand in hand with equalizing learning opportunities. Cost can't be ignored but balanced enrollments should help open the door to offering the same classes and facilities at each school.

Beyond public hearings, the school board should consider a redistricting hotline to quell rumors, summarize options and encourage comments.

Once new school attendance boundaries are drawn, children have a right to expect inspired orientation to help ease the transition to their new school. Jagged lines on attendance boundary maps neither provide substance to a school nor ultimately shape its destiny.

But motivated students, innovative teachers, streetwise administrators and open-minded parents do.

THINKASA



THE RIVER ROUGE NEEDS YOU

Cleaning up — Part II

Volunteers needed for river rescue day

MENTION THE Rouge River and most people agree that something has to be done to clean it up. But most have the feeling that no matter what is done it won't be enough and it won't happen soon. So, they turn their attention to other problems.

Well, something is being done. But it's going to take time — 20 years — money — about \$1 billion — and continued public support to stay on track.

Certainly, residents must demand that government officials and industry leaders work toward a solution to clean up what is an environmental shame.

But residents must also accept responsibility. The majority of pollution is caused by people not industry. Industries do contribute to pollution but they are less than 10 percent of the problem. Raw sewage has been found to be the biggest polluter of the Rouge.

FRIENDS of the Rouge is an organization dedicated to keeping the cleanup message before the public. And the Friends are looking for your help on Saturday, June 6, for Rouge Rescue II.

The group is aiming for a big turnout — 5,000 people.

"If the public doesn't show its support, then the politicians and bureaucrats won't be able to do what's necessary," says James Murray, president of the group.

Cleanup sites as of late last month included Birmingham, Farmington, Livonia, Plymouth, Southfield, and locations in Wayne and Oakland counties.

Local governments that have pledged their support from the Observer & Eccentric circulation areas include Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Canton Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Redford Township and Westland.

VOLUNTEERS are needed to assist in the following communities:

- Birmingham — Coco Stewert, 842-7024
- Canton Township — Dave Schneider, 397-1000
- Farmington — Earl Billing, 473-7250
- Farmington Hills — Dale Coughlin, 473-9520

Legon, 473-9520.

• Livonia — Jeanne Treff, 421-200, Ext. 351.

• Plymouth/Plymouth Township — Esther Hulsing, 453-3840.

• Southfield — Steve Marshall, 354-9546.

• Westland — Ralph Tack, 728-1770.

Although recruiting 5,000 volunteers appears to be an ambitious undertaking, consider that more than 1.5 million people live and work in the 467-square-mile areas known as the Rouge River Basin. The 126-mile long river runs through 42 communities including all 12 in which the O&E serves.

Last year, the O&E published a special all-news section on the Rouge River. In the section we outlined eight steps to a renewed Rouge.

The first step is that every individual living and working in the Rouge Basin be part of the cleanup, not part of the problem.

To be part of this year's Rouge Rescue call the people listed here or call 42-ROUGE.

Fond memories of a political hero

SOMEWHERE tucked away in a closet or bottom drawer is a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings, collected somewhere between 1962 and 1967.

Dusty and yellowed now, the articles represent a street kid's transformation to adulthood. Maybe you've got a scrapbook that helped you out during those awful adolescent days.

If not a scrapbook, you'll find a memory or two tucked away which kind of guides you along, acts as a reminder of why you are the way you are today. I really haven't given my collection much thought lately — not until the other night, anyway.

That's when I read that George Romney was being honored at some dinner in New York City. A quiet smile broke across my face as memories rushed in, reminding me of a kid I would hardly recognize today.

THE ARTICLES chronicle the political era of the silver-haired politician. Romney wouldn't recognize me from the next guy on the corner. But he changed my life.

Although I often go to many more dinners than I care to remember, I truly wish I was in New York tonight. I'd really like to get up and say, "Thanks George. I couldn't have done it without you."

But since I'll be cheering on the Red Wings down at Joe Louis Arena, instead, I'll say it from the innards of the Crackerbarrel.

And that's only appropriate. The Crackerbarrel is written in much the same spirit that Romney would deliver many of his stemwinding political speeches.



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

ent political path than Romney, he was my hero, out and out when I was a teenager. No way around it.

No rock and roll for this kid. It was all politics. And Romney was my star.

I'LL BETCHA I shook that guy's hand 20 or 30 times in those five years. I even used to take teenage girlfriends on dates to see George Romney make speeches. Imagine what those 16 and 17 year-old girls must have thought. Sure, I laugh now, too.

But he made me see that it was important to use all my talents to their fullest and help make a better world.

Besides, he was about the most exciting speaker I ever saw.

I can still see him rolling up his sleeves, waving his fist, pointing his finger, always challenging the establishment whether it be business or labor.

George made us all think again about the beliefs we took for granted. He also demonstrated the importance of leading a vigorous and vital life.

George is celebrating his 80th birthday this year. That hardly seems possible. Guys like him always seem young. Thanks George for those years. It was a beautiful time in my life. I just hope I can help someone out the way you helped me.

Library bills

One hard, fast law isn't the way to go

BEFORE WE bruise state Sen. Doug Cruce too seriously for his library bills, let's consider the good side of his message.

Government often does things private enterprise is doing. Sometimes that's good; sometimes bad.

Cruce, R-Troy, thinks it's bad that public libraries compete with commercial videocassette rental shops. His bills would prohibit libraries from charging rents.

The subject is far bigger than libraries.

GOVERNMENT was good the day I was hunting for a copy of "The Federalist Papers," those magnificent essays on the U.S. Constitution by Hamilton, Jay and Madison.

Commercial bookstores failed to carry one of the greatest documents in American history. The computers must have told the chain stores that Federalists wouldn't turn over often enough to produce a good return on investment.

Well, that's business. And that's why we have government (i.e., public) libraries.

OUR NEARBY public libraries also contain stacks of newsletters from our friendly local state representatives — regularly published by the thousands. Most of the stuff can be found in newspapers. These newsletters are

what I call "socialized journalism." There is one significant difference: The newspaper tells you how your friendly state rep voted on a bill; the state rep's newsletter skips that, leading to the uncomfortable conclusion that our state reps are out to promote their images rather than to inform.

Now Oakland County commissioners are performing the same invaluable service. Cable TV has been a godsend to many politicians. Wayne County Executive William Lucas (1983-86) miraculously found money in red-ink-stained budgets for a large TV crew and remarkably discovered an outlet across the state for his programs. What an enlightening supplement to commercial broadcasts!

And then Wayne County commissioners followed suit.

LEST YOU suspect I'm concerned only about socialism in communications, let me direct your attention to "Mapbook of Michigan Counties" published by the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and promoted in much state advertising. DNR's 11 by 17-inch book is directly competitive with "Guide to Fun in Michigan" published by the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC), a federation of outdoors persons clubs.

MUCC was in the field first. But judging by bookstore displays, the DNR



Tim Richard

publication is doing well though it's far inferior to MUCC's book.

MUCC's Guide lists not only state campgrounds but county and National Forest Service campgrounds; major lake locations, acreages and public access sites; canoe and snowmobile trails — in short, it's double the value of DNR's book for about the same price.

ONE COULD GO on, but it's time to come to the point. The point is that it's unwise to say that private enterprise always is right or that government always is more trustworthy.

Let people in the market decide what they want to buy or rent, and vote with their dollars. Let local library boards decide how to manage their resources, and allow voters to pass judgment.

One hard and fast law for everyone isn't the way.

CORRECTION: This column erred April 16 in describing Rep. Jim Kosteva as being from Lansing. He dwells in Canton Township.