

Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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Council races

Don't let spending skyrocket

IF YOU spend the most money and garner the most votes, did you buy the election? That's a question lingering from the Farmington Hills City Council race last fall.

On their post-election campaign expense reports filed with the Oakland County Elections Division, the top five finishers each reported spending more than \$2,000.

The top vote-getter, incumbent Joe Alkatieb, reported spending the most: \$11,030.

The runnerup, challenger Jean Fox, reported spending more than \$7,150, although \$3,700 was listed as repayment of a personal loan she made to her campaign.

The third-place finisher, incumbent Terry Sever, reported spending \$2,154. Challenger Aldo Vagnozzi reported spending \$5,600 to capture the fourth and final seat. He beat out incumbent Joan Dudley, who reported spending \$2,394.

So a case could be made that money talked. But how loudly it talked is open to debate.

SURE ALKATIEB spent the most and got the most votes. But he also was a two-term incumbent whose popularity seemed to be on the rise following his year as mayor in 1986.

Fox didn't have the power of incumbency. But she was well known for her involvement in promoting historical preservation, park development and zoning enforcement.

Both made no secret about their conservative political philosophy in a largely Republican city.

Vagnozzi, a longtime council watcher and civil libertarian, drew heavy Democratic fund-raising support in unseating a veteran councilwoman.

Beyond campaign-war chests, Alkatieb and Vagnozzi used political lawn signs. How strongly the signs reinforced name recognition is hard to gauge. But they couldn't have hurt.

Alkatieb traced the roots of his spending to 1981, when he lost his first re-election bid. This

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time, he said, he ran scared and hard. "If you've lost once, you know the feeling."

Vagnozzi acknowledged the seeming contradiction in spending more for a two-year term than he'll earn as a councilman (\$1,800 a year).

SPENDING IN last fall's Livonia council campaign dwarfed that in Farmington Hills, deflating the argument that more spending means more votes. Two challengers spent \$44,000 and \$30,000 but lost. The top vote-getter spent \$15,600, the fourth highest amount.

Farmington Hills City Council candidates traditionally have spent \$2,000 to \$4,000. Two years ago, top spender Ben Marks spent \$3,600 en route to a third-place finish and a four-year term.

This year's jump in spending could doom the candidacies of residents who would serve the city well but who lack political contacts and fund-raising savvy.

A campaign spending limit isn't the answer; it would be too arbitrary. A volunteer spending limit isn't practical.

So voters are the ultimate judge.

With campaign spending escalating, it's more important than ever for voters to take note not only of who is spending what, but who is contributing to whom. That's why the Observer highlights pre-election campaign expense reports the Thursday before each council election.

A discerning, enlightened electorate is the most effective way to control campaign spending. Voters are the last defense to keeping the city council a truly people's panel.

Primaries

It's time voters got them back

HAPPY NEW YEAR, folks. It's now 1988, the year we elect a new president.

But let's say it right here, right now: Michigan's presidential selection process is a mess. It must be changed.

Need proof? Take a look at the GOP goings-on in western Wayne County's 2nd District, which includes Plymouth and part of Livonia. There, supporters of Vice President George Bush and members of a Jack Kemp/Pat Robertson coalition can't even stand to be in the same room with each other. A few days from now, they will hold separate district conventions — leaving a potentially nasty credentials fight to determine who gets to sit inside at the state convention later this month in Grand Rapids, and who gets left out in the cold.

DISTRICT conventions are supposed to be grass-roots politics at its best. But this is grass-roots politics at its worst.

Ignored in all the wrangling over this one national office are many items closer to home. Republicans have a U.S. Senate candidate and a slew of local candidates to nominate. Think the 2nd District GOP is giving any thought to them these days?

Regarding the presidential process itself, all this maneuvering and fine print reading of party bylaws is downright scary. It could wind up delivering a sizable number of national convention votes — and possibly the nomination — to a presidential candidate who couldn't beat his party rivals in a head-to-head test among Michigan voters. How's that for democracy?

Not that the Michigan GOP or its 2nd District branch is much worse than any other political organization.

MICHIGAN Democrats didn't exactly cover themselves with glory with their confounding 1984 presidential selection process. Remember that closed, less-than-secret-ballot process helped produce a standard-bearer with appeal so broad he carried just one of the 50 states.

It's time for a return to the primary system. So primaries leave a bad taste in some people's mouths around these parts. So the memory of GOP pranksters crossing over to vote for George Wallace in the 1972 state Democratic primary still rankles. So what?

There are ways to prevent that from happening again. The best way is to have spirited, competitive primaries for state offices. Races like that would keep Republican and Democrats in the fold even if their party's presidential primary became a walkover.

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Regardless of party affiliation or place on the political spectrum, we all deserve more of a voice in how our president is chosen. Primaries give us that voice. But primaries won't happen unless we make them happen.

We can write state party leaders demanding a return to primaries or we can sit idly by while the boys and girls in the smoky back rooms twiddle their thumbs — and play fast and loose with our future.

Here are the addresses:

Michigan Republican State Committee
2121 E. Grand River
Lansing, Mich. 48912-3299
Spencer Abraham, chairman

Michigan Democratic State Committee
606 Townsend
Lansing, Mich. 48912-3299
Rick Wiener, chairman



The Michigan "Legislative Agenda Leftovers" Cries of Concern.

Catching up on news as a new year starts

NEW YEAR'S nuggets to help usher in 1988:

• Every once in a while, someone comes along who's daily routine is a source of lasting inspiration.

Loretta Conway is such a person. So it's no surprise co-workers named the widely respected gerontologist Employee of the Year at Farmington Hills' recognition awards night Monday.

For 14 years, she has been the torchbearer for the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services Senior Adult Division.

And to say she has done yeoman's work would hardly do justice to her commitment to our community's elderly.

City manager William Costick cited Conway's "outstanding job performance, excellent relations with co-workers and positive contributions to the city of Farmington Hills during the past year."

But her value as senior adult supervisor was best captured by those who nominated her for the city's top employee award.

One co-worker said Conway "is available for and committed to the senior adults seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

Another said, "In spite of long hours and a tremendous workload, Loretta's disposition and smile are bright enough to light up city hall. And they do."

Said a third: "I'm proud to be a member of her staff and I'm grateful for the learning environment she has made available."



Bob Sklar

There's no nicer "thank you" than to be honored by your peers. So enjoy your moment in the sun, Loretta. You richly deserve it.

• Why do we detail crimes in news stories?

That's what readers most often ask us.

Our reply: because it's news.

Residents and business folks alike are interested in the scope and severity of crime. Whether you live in an older neighborhood near Middlebelt and Grand River or work in a spanking new office building near 12 Mile and Farmington Road, interest in crime runs high.

Nobody likes to be robbed, assaulted or otherwise preyed upon. Whether you steal a \$250 VCR or a \$25,000 car, someone is victimized. Whether you break into a \$50,000 bungalow or a \$250,000 colonial, it's still a burglary.

In both Farmington and Farmington Hills, the law enforcement budgets are the largest of any city department. That underscores the importance of council members and taxpayers attach to police protection and criminal investigation.

What's more, crime news is one of

the most popular parts of our newspaper, a ready indicator of what kind of information readers want.

Despite what our critics think, we're not into sensationalism. The National Enquirer isn't our role model.

We take great pains to present sometimes sordid crime details in a way we consider suitable for a family newspaper. Some crime stories pass by the eyes of several editors.

We try to be sensitive to victims and defendants. We know the difference between a charge and a conviction.

Remember: We don't create crime news. We simply report it.

Granted, it's not always pleasant to read. But would you rather live or work in a community where you didn't have the slightest idea of where and what crimes were being committed?

• The obscenities and racial slurs spray-painted on the Farmington home of Diana and Derwin Success, a biracial couple, two days before Christmas reinforced the need for the Farmington area's fledgling Cultural Awareness Committee.

It's obvious the committee faces a rigorous challenge in striving "to stem discrimination and prejudice" and "to raise the community's consciousness about the variety of cultures and traditions in our neighborhoods."

But the committee won't succeed in a vacuum. It needs active community support.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Seniors earn vote of thanks

To the editor:

I'd like to express my thanks to those senior citizens who helped address envelopes for the Farmington Area Goodwill Dress and Shirt Program.

Addressing envelopes may seem insignificant to some, but this meant a lot to our committee and saved much time.

Thanks again.

Shirley Richardson,
program coordinator,
Farmington

Kids need your help

To the editor:

Nothing expresses the spirit of the holidays better than the smiles of children. We are blessed that our nation's progress and prosperity allow so many youngsters to enjoy safe, happy holidays.

But this season of giving is also a time to remember that thousands of American kids are "children at risk." Let us ask ourselves, "What will the new year hold for youth who

are at risk of drug dependency, neglect, abuse or failure to gain an education?"

"Children at risk" pose a grave challenge to our country. While economic growth has helped the great majority of our people, the proportion of children in poverty grew from 15 to 20 percent since 1970. But help is there.

The achievements of two of our ACTION (federal domestic volunteer agency) programs — the Foster Grandparent Program and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) — have proven that great progress occurs when the knowledge of older volunteers is used to help disadvantaged youngsters. Often, "children at risk" are the offspring of low-income parents, particularly of single mothers.

An excellent way to assist a child to break free from the cycle of poverty and dependency is to give that child as well as his family a role model and friend in a senior citizen. Personal concern and love can't be legislated or bought, but it is abundant in the commitment, time and understanding given by senior volunteers.

We need more Foster Grandparents, more RSVP volunteers, and more seniors active in the hundreds of private, community volunteer projects around the U.S. We need citizens and business, churches and civic groups, and individuals from

every part of the community who will pitch in and support programs for "at-risk" youth.

If we each do our part, we will someday see a holiday season that is full of hope and joy for all of America's children.

Donna Alvarado,
ACTION,
Washington, D.C. 20515

Teacher was very inspiring

To the editor:

How deeply saddened I was to read about the death of Dr. James Vendettoli. His "World Religions" class was probably the most inspiring of any class I have taken at Oakland Community College.

He was gentle and kind and helped all of us discover an inner person and another dimension in our lives. He never preached, he just allowed us to think and learn.

If anyone came out of his class not having learned a great deal about themselves, they missed a wonderful opportunity.

I will never forget him or his wonderful class.

Pat Thoreson,
Farmington

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