

Opinion

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

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Say yes

Renew 5.75 mills for schools

DONT PLAY politics with the lives of 10,700 students. Threats by some parents that they'll vote no in the upcoming Farmington Public Schools tax renewal election in protest to citizens committee-proposed school attendance boundary changes are ludicrous.

You don't jeopardize the education of this community's young people for the sake of making an unrelated political statement.

Voters will consider renewing 5.75 mills of Farmington Public Schools' 32.5-mill operational tax levy for 10 years. That tax rate is 9 percent below the average for Oakland County's 28 school districts.

The renewal represents \$8 million — 12 percent of the district's \$66 million operating budget. Sweeping cuts, touching every facet of programming, staffing and facility improvements, undoubtedly would accompany a no vote. Dozens of classroom teachers, the largest employee group, would be sent packing.

DONT BE misled. The renewal would not be new tax. But the school taxes you pay won't necessarily stay the same. You may pay more if the value of your property has gone up, a likely prospect in a thriving district ranking among the top five in the county in state equalized value.

But Farmington Public Schools voters have never defeated a school tax renewal. There's no good reason to start now. Vote yes Tuesday, Feb. 9.

Even though the inflation rate isn't running wild, it's still a factor to be reckoned with. The district's employee benefit costs, for example, have climbed 19 percent to \$6.6 million.

What's more, the district will soon have to pay the employee portion of the Social Security tax, to the tune of \$1.6 million, said Michael Flanagan, deputy superintendent.

Wages for 1,900 employees represent the single biggest component of the district's budget: 75 percent. Trustees have tried to keep wages competitive without breaking the budget. This year's 7-percent raise for teachers is midway between

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the county's 6-8.8 percent range.

THE BALLOT proposal asks that the 5.75 mills be renewed without applying Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment for the 1988-89 school year only. Headlee would apply to the remainder of the operational tax rate.

Property taxes generate 84 percent of the district's operating revenue. A school district with rising property values, like ours, provides a sort of built-in mechanism to avoid having to constantly seek a higher property tax rate.

That should be clearly understood by voters, who have just as much right to press for a lower tax rate in the wake of increased property values.

"Truth in taxation" hearings held each spring are where district taxpayers can stand up and say, "Hey, you're getting more dollars because property values are up. Make the case to us that you need the extra dollars."

DONT TAKE quality education for granted. It must be nurtured and actively supported.

A community doesn't slash \$8 million from the public school budget without a rippling effect that punishes everyone to some extent, even the households without a school-age child.

Real estate indicators show a correlation between the Farmington area's strong property values and the quality of its schools.

So consider the tax renewal request on its own merit, not in the unrelated context of the proposed school attendance boundary changes. Make it your business to vote responsibly.

Come Tuesday, Feb. 9, vote yes. More than 10,000 students are counting — make that depending — on you.

Censorship

High court teaches wrong lesson

OUR SCHOOL children are being cheated out of a great American Heritage. The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision condoning an educator's action in blatantly censoring a high school newspaper is a decision which endangers the future of a free and open press.

The U.S. Supreme Court, retarded by its inability to differentiate between social responsibility and criminal conduct, has written a ruling that will inhibit our children from learning one of the most important tenets of our Constitution — First Amendment rights — your right to information.

A PRESS expert outlines the consequences of this decision.

"In effect, it (the ruling) said you can learn about the First Amendment in school but you can't practice it. You can only practice it when you get out of school."

Because of this decision our children will be taught an ethic which approves of press censorship. They will carry this new belief into adulthood. Newsrooms around the country will never be the same when that mentality permeates them. Neither will your access to information.

In its ruling the court said that a Hazelwood, Mo., high school principal did not violate students' free-speech right by ordering two pages deleted from an issue of a student newspaper.

"A school need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission even though the government could not censor similar speech outside the school," Justice Byron R. White wrote for the court.

He said judicial intervention to protect student free-speech rights is warranted "only when the decision to censor a school-sponsored publication, theatrical production or other vehicle of student expression has no valid educational purpose."

The dissenting justices accused the court of condoning "thought control," adding "Such unthinking contempt for individual rights is intolerable."

In surveying the reaction of administrators in the Observer & Eccentric circulation area, we discovered mixed feelings about the ruling. But one message did ring clear.

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One example of this misunderstanding was the recent remarks by Livonia Churchill principal William MacFarland who believes the "ruling doesn't limit First Amendment rights at all. Your publisher controls your paper . . . I think that they (the justices) established that the publisher of a newspaper has a right to control its contents."

IN TRUTH responsible publishers and owners never ham-handedly yank pages of copy from an edition as was done by the Missouri principal involved in the Supreme Court case.

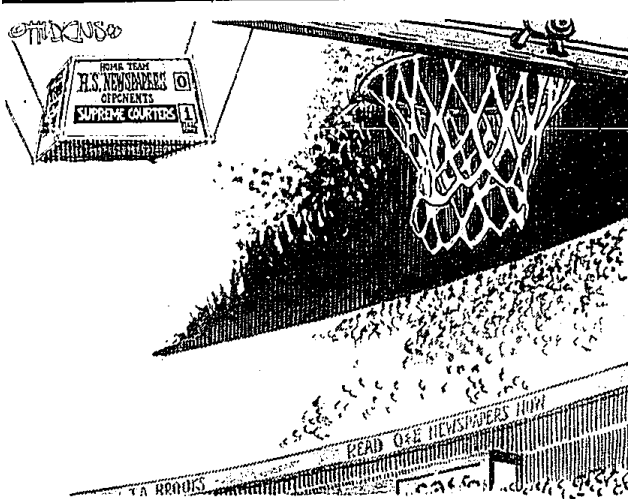
And responsible is the key word in this entire debate. Responsibility is never taught by someone else taking an irresponsible action.

Unfortunately, the principal's attitude is typical of those who believe in the fiction of the newsroom portrayed in old movies. Certainly issues are debated, arguments won or lost in the newsroom environment. And many an editor has been called on the carpet by a publisher.

But inevitably stories run because publishers know the success of their products depend on credibility. And a censored product just doesn't have it.

As Plymouth high school student Cyndi Mueller said, newspapers in this country were established "to be a watchdog" in society. We live in the only country where that principle exists. High school newspapers aren't any exception.

In this country, you don't have to be licensed or sanctioned to be a journalist. You don't have to be part of the establishment. You just have to have the will to tell the story of your community as you see it, whether it be the world, the state, the city or your school.



Historic district panel should review Spicer

ONE GROUP isn't trying to steal another's thunder.

The city council isn't insulting the parks and recreation commission by asking historic district commissioners to consider including Heritage Park's Estate House in Farmington Hills' historic district and to suggest potential uses for the 62-year-old structure.

Council members made it clear they wanted the hard-working parks and rec folks to continue developing a use plan for the former Spicer farmhouse and its out-buildings.

Common sense dictates that two groups with different expertise working in concert toward a common objective should reap bigger dividends than if brainstorming and field work were limited to just one group.

Not only might historic district commissioners propose ideas that didn't occur to their counterparts on the parks and rec board, but they might be able to better identify proposals incompatible with historic preservation.

Councilwoman Jean Fox praised parks and recreation commissioners for coming "as far as they have with everything we have expected."

But, she said, "I think by asking input from the historic district commission, you are only availing yourself of some people very expert in this field, who have dealt with many, many homes that have been in this condition, who have some expertise that the parks and rec people could



Bob Sklar

not be expected to have because their main thrust is in another direction."

MAYOR JODY Soronen said the historic district commission "very obviously has a very keen interest in the house and perhaps we were negligent in not approaching both commissions at the same time."

Last week, council members reiterated they didn't want the wrecker's ball anywhere near the house.

Mayor Soronen also distributed a letter from parks and recreation commission chairman Dennis Fitzgerald. He said the commission's short-term goal was to develop renovation plans and cost estimates for turning the site into a visitor center.

Both actions supported city manager William Costick's belief that demolishing the house was simply "a passing fancy" by some who "felt that maybe something other than preserving the house ought to be done."

GIVEN THE "panoramic view of 211 acres of pretty nice looking land," as Fitzgerald put it, the house would seem to make an ideal visitor center, provided that costs can be

kept reasonable.

Just to improve the house so it meets building code and municipal liability requirements would cost \$150,000, based on early projections. That's before any structural improvements to accommodate specific uses.

Councilwoman Fox, a local historian, strongly suggested that the historic district commission, which has restored six other historic structures, might have a better fix on potential costs.

Councilmen Joe Alkateeb and Aldo Vagnozzi were rightly concerned about continually pouring money into the house without a fix on its future.

But a proposal from the parks and rec board now seems likely in February.

IN A brief, but icebreaking statement, chairman Paul Blizman should have allayed fears that historic district commissioners had any intention of usurping their parks and rec counterparts.

As he put it, "I've got no problem in meeting with members of the parks and recreation commission. And I'm sure there are other members of the historic district commission who would be happy to meet with the parks and recreation commission, recognizing they have the main responsibility for Heritage Park."

If that's not an invitation to work together for the common good, I don't know what is.

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.

Botsford is fine hospital

To the editor:

While home for the Christmas holidays, I happened to read your article about Botsford Hospital. It reported that HICFA, a governmental agency, had cited the mortality rate at Botsford Hospital to be higher than average.

As a medical student and later as an intern, I can tell you that Botsford Hospital had one of the finest training programs not just in Michigan but in the country. Medical students and post-graduate trainees stood in line to be accepted for positions at Botsford for a variety of specialties.

During my time at Botsford, I had the opportunity to work on the neurology service with John Raymond, D.O., and Fred Marshall, D.O. They offered top-notch care and training by any standard, M.D. or D.O. Gastroenterology (internal medicine) with Michael Biederman was superb. These physicians taught us how to take care of people!

These physicians also served the underprivileged at Zeiger Hospital in downtown Detroit and this too was a very rewarding experience.

Now in practice and training med-

ical students myself, I am grateful for the opportunity those men and Botsford Hospital gave me.

My parents have resided in Farmington for many years. Health and Education have been our "bag." Take an "insiders' opinion: the Farmington area has one of the finest osteopathic hospitals in the country and can be quite proud of it.

Nicholas Abid, D.O.
board certified, psychiatry
Holland, Mich.

Tell us about voting trends

To the editor:

In your Jan. 7 "Points of View," you asked us to let our legislators know how we feel about the Kiddle Tax.

I would like the names of those senators and representatives who voted for that tax from our locality. If we, as voters, are to make an intelligent decision, when it comes to putting an individual in office or removing them, then we need those specifics.

While you're at it, tell us who's responsible for the reinstatement of auto emissions testing, increasing the cigarette tax, drivers license

fees, the tax on alcohol for Wayne County's jails, and the increased parking fees at Metro, putting deposits on wine cooler bottles, and taking the money from the lottery away from the schools and putting it into a general fund.

Give us their names, and when they're up for re-election, then, perhaps, you'll see the government more responsive to the wishes of the governed.

T. James Zavotti
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Bodily abuse can be beaten

To the editor:

Physical abuse can be beaten. I truly believe that.

Together as a city, we must join in this moral and social problem. Will you, with the help of the press, teachers, police and city manager, help me in this effort?

Money is not the answer. Education is. Helping those that need it. If we do not help, can we truly call ourselves loving, caring human beings? Open your eyes and hearts. A child cries out for our help.

Vernon C. Klepninski
Farmington Hills

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