

Opinion

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Take interest County government important

COLOR IT invisible.

It certainly seems to be. Few people know what the county commission does, let alone who their county commissioner is.

So it's not surprising the race for the Republican nomination in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners 27th District has picked little voter interest. The 27th, representing 54,000 residents, encompasses all of Farmington and much of Farmington Hills.

Glamorous, county government isn't.

Even Donn Wolf, squaring off against Jody Soronen for the GOP nomination, calls it "the mystery government." As he aptly put it, "Many people don't know who anybody is or what anybody does."

The 27-member commission meets twice monthly at the County Courthouse in Pontiac to set budget and policy for the county, one of the nation's wealthiest.

UNLIKE A city council, the service-oriented county commission doesn't consider many ordinances.

Commissioners provide health programs, run airports, appoint boards and approve labor contracts. They also provide such lesser known services as out-of-court mediation.

Oakland, through the county commission, has been a pioneer in countywide public works, tornado siren warnings and out-of-court mediation.

Through the county's Community and Economic Development Department, commissioners also provide consulting and staff funding for business development and expansion along the I-696 corridor.

The commission does a lot of things ordinary citizens don't see, care about or appreciate until a need arises.

Nowadays, it's wrestling with some mighty key spending decisions: courthouse expansion, library consolidation and expansion, solid waste

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disposal and labor contracts.

Rarely do individual commissioners make a difference when the Republican-dominated board as a whole meets. They make a difference through committee work — by the kinds of questions they ask, the kinds of amendments they seek and the kinds of insight they provide.

WAYNE COUNTY government is much more politicized than Oakland County government.

Oakland's commissioners are more self-effacing. Commission meetings are no place to grandstand. Besides, there's nothing to grandstand about.

Commissioners are paid \$17,191 a year — \$1,600 more if they chair a committee. But you would be hard pressed to find anyone that sought the job for the pay.

Because it produces so little name recognition, serving as a county commissioner isn't much of a political stepping stone. In a recent countywide poll, not one commissioner boasted more than 2 percent name recognition.

Most commissioners take on the job simply out of a desire to repay their community for some of what it has given to them.

Thinking about skipping the county commission part of your ballot in the Aug. 2 primary or the Nov. 8 general election?

Consider that commissioners oversee a \$263 million operating budget and 3,581 employees.

And that they collect and spend 4.69 mills of your yearly property tax bill each year. If your house is worth \$150,000, that works out to \$351 — hardly extraneous cash.

Vehicle tax

Political leadership is needed

OAKLAND COUNTY roads — like the searing weather — are something everyone talks about but no one wants to do much about. It's hard to find anyone vigorously campaigning for voter approval Nov. 8 of the \$25-per-vehicle fee to improve transportation facilities within the county.

Roads should be an issue throughout 1988, not just in the final days before the presidential election. Voters should turn on the political heat by asking state legislative and county candidates and even local officials about road money at every opportunity.

Candidates willing to say "yes" should be given bonus points. Those who say "no" should be given grudging credit for candor. But candidates who slip, slide and dodge should be penalized.

THE STORY behind the issue that most candidates are dodging goes like this:

The Oakland County Road Commission, an appointed body with limited powers, surveyed communities two years ago and produced a list of projects needed for economic development. Price tag: \$740 million over 10 years, or \$74 million a year, in new money.

The OCR, lacking authority to raise new revenue, turned to the state Legislature with a wish list of ideas. Most fell by the wayside. A batch of state license fees were raised, which should bring in somewhere between \$8 million and \$12 million a year. Remember, the goal was \$74 million.

The Legislature passed only one local option — the \$25 vehicle registration fee. It would raise \$19 million a year. The OCR, lacking authority to put it on the ballot, turned to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. Without endorsing it, the commissioners first put it on the Aug. 2 ballot, then found a snafu in the county clerk's office had made that date impossible, and finally rescheduled it for the Nov. 8 ballot.

Again, commissioners didn't endorse it. And the OCR can't use public funds to campaign for it.

TO ITS CREDIT, a group of real estate people and developers is putting together an advertising campaign to win voter approval. That's laudable,

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but it also will take political leadership.

Some politicians peddle a local option fuel tax — the more miles you cover, the more you pay. Unfortunately, that bill failed in Lansing. It's simply not an option, at least this year. But you could ask legislative candidates about 1989.

Others wanted developer impact fees. They argued that developers responsible for economic growth should pay the cost of ramps, intersection fixes, additional lanes and traffic signals that their projects necessitated. Again, that bill failed in Lansing. But you could ask legislative candidates about 1989.

Under Michigan's city home rule law, cities can write charters levying up to 20 mills. Many suburban cities levy far less than the limit. City councils who perceive they have a road problem should either look at raising their charter limits or back the only option that's available.

IN 1988, ONLY one option is available — a \$25 annual fee on every truck, van, auto and road-using motorized vehicle. (It wouldn't apply to trailers.)

It has its disadvantages — nicking three-car families for \$75 a year without regard to their needs. But it's the OCR's offer, the \$19 million will be spent in cities, villages and townships in proportion to the number of vehicles registered there. And it will be up to local councils and governing boards to decide how the new revenue will be used.

It's popular to assume there's a "tax revolt." We don't see it that way. People will vote money when they are convinced there's a need and that they will benefit. Candidates who would be officeholders will have to tell them up front about the need and benefits. That will take more than an advertising campaign paid for by developers.

It will take political leadership.

Legislative leadership.

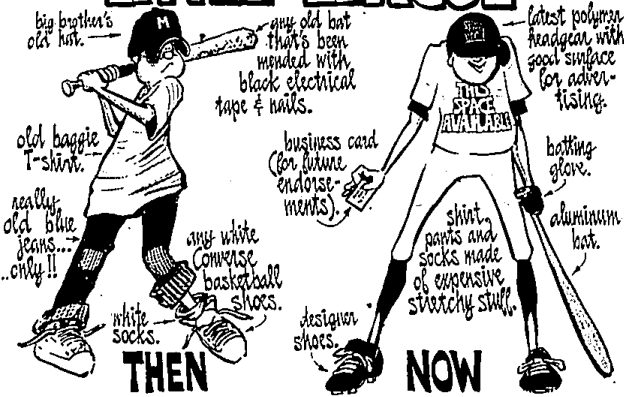
County executive leadership.

County commission leadership.

City council, village council and township board leadership.

And heal from patriotic and concerned Oakland County road users.

ETHNIC LITTLE LEAGUE



Ethnicity has no place in state House contest

ETHNIC SLURS already have marred the hot race to fill the House seat held by Sandy Broderick, a Farmington Republican stepping down this year after 14 years as a state representative.

The youngest of the four GOP hopefuls, Mike Sarafa, played back his answering machine one day last week, only to hear the caller say she didn't want an Arab representing the 69th state House district.

Frankly, I didn't realize the Farmington-area district, which happens to be where I live, is so exclusive. I don't condone that exclusivity. It's a district worthy of any qualified candidate's representation.

If Sarafa, the son of immigrant parents, top fellow challengers Jan Dolan, Mike Bouchard and Paul Welby in the GOP primary Aug. 2, he should be the Republican torchbearer for the Nov. 8 general election.

It's as simple as that. This is no political endorsement. It's just a reminder of how a representative democracy works.

HIS CHALDEAN ancestry and support should be no more or less of an advantage or burden than any



Bob Sklar

other facet of his background.

Sarafa's ancestry had no bearing on Farmington Hills resident Max Fisher, a leader of the Jewish community who has endorsed the candidate.

Fisher judged the 22-year-old on the basis of his "energy and his insight," not his Middle Eastern roots. The irony is that Sarafa received his hate call two weeks before the 24th annual Farmington/Farmington Hills Founders Festival.

The midsummer festival, started to honor our community's Quaker beginnings in 1824, sports a cultural theme this year: "Kaleidoscope of the World."

The theme was chosen by our community's Cultural Awareness Committee, dedicated to raising our community's "consciousness about

the variety of cultures and traditions in our neighborhoods."

HAVE YOU taken the time to notice the many nationalities who call Farmington or Farmington Hills home? Do you know any of the first-generation families in your neighborhood?

Farmington Public Schools' bilingual staff writes and speaks 18 languages. We are, as Cultural Awareness Committee vice chair Joan Dudley aptly put it, "becoming truly cosmopolitan."

Chairman Jim Agnew would like the committee "to be a source of removing the fear of difference." You can't fault its mission — to promote an understanding of cultural differences, foster an interest in learning about each other and nurture an appreciation for our multi-heritage.

But it's clear the committee and the community have a brier patch of prejudice left to conquer, given the slurs Mike Sarafa has to endure in a race that's supposed to be decided on issues, trust, politics and integrity — not ethnicity.

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.

News stories spur reaction

To the editor:

Kudos for the June 30 front-page article on Marian McCracken, the beautiful president of Michigan NOW, who works hard to better life for all women.

Brickbats for the silly, shallow feature (same edition) on Leigh Nolans and the photographer, who believes all women want to be pin-ups. They don't!

Virginia Nicoll, president, Older Women's League-Michigan, Farmington

Let's improve moral climate

To the editor:

Let's put a stop to this madness! Our young and America are going down the "drain."

Let's clean up the moral climate. Start by putting a stop to pornography. Pornography is not a victimless crime.

The crime rate in Cincinnati dropped 53 percent when the adult bookstores and X-rated movie houses were closed.

The laws are already on the books. Our law enforcement agencies must start enforcing them. Let these people know how you feel and that they are elected to office to uphold the laws that have made this country great. And pornography wasn't one of them.

Let's promote some good values — as sanctity of marriage and

Spelling bees are defended

To the editor:

Another absurdity has burst into print and needs some rebuttal! When correspondent Citron describes national bees as "ridiculous" and their contestants as "grinds," he demeans only himself. Such a view is obviously as dangerous as it is preposterous.

Spelling bees at all levels reward and encourage excellence. Naturally the losers will be disappointed, just as in sporting, chess and political contests, but it is a great accomplishment even to be eligible as a contestant in these matches.

The poor speller in our society suffers a serious handicap. Most teachers react negatively to bad spelling and then grade papers and tests accordingly. The careless misspelling on a job application often prevents a candidate from obtaining the position desired.

The letter writer should realize that the youngster who prepares for a spelling bee also learns the meanings of many new words.

Patterns emerge as the student becomes aware of the roots, stems and affixes, usually Latin or Greek, that are found in tens of thousands of so-called "English" words. This knowledge then increases the individual's vocabulary exponentially.

"Lithophilous" and "immitance," cited by Citron, are perfect examples.

There was a very obscure card attached from Christina Miller of Hepard Associates. I want to publicly thank them for the tremendous tribute. Thank you for reminding us of our glorious freedom.

M. Randolph, Farmington

Lovely flag nice tribute

To the editor:

On July 4 at 6 a.m., I was pleasantly surprised to discover a lovely flag on my front lawn. At first, I thought it might have been from a veterans society in memory of my brother, who passed away last month.

This was not a toy, but a very nice 12-by-17-inch vinyl flag, implanted very firmly in our soil. That wasn't an easy task.

It didn't take long to determine that this was not a single memorial. My entire street and the adjoining streets were also recipients of this wonderful tribute. In many instances, the free flag was the only one flying.

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Richard W. Rosenbaum, Bloomfield Hills

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