

# Opinion

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## Code of ethics

### Hills council should adopt one

**I**T MIGHT not have prevented Farmington Hills councilman Ben Marks from seeking special treatment for a business debt he owed the city.

Still, a personal code of ethics would give council members a clear-cut set of standards to live by.

Marks' experience is a graphic example of why the city council erred in dismissing former councilwoman Joan Dudley's call for such a code during last year's council race.

A code of ethics would go a long way toward settling the debate about when the spotlight should be turned on a council member's business dealings with the city. In our mind, light should be shed whenever something out of the ordinary occurs.

As Dudley outlined, such a code also would address: business relationships between council members and private industry; election practices, especially as they relate to city employees; council members' responsibilities before, during and after spending public money for seminars and conventions; and the practice of conducting council business over the telephone.

Beyond those areas, a code of ethics would cover other potential conflicts, such as accepting gifts. And it would provide a framework for insulating the city manager and city administration from council politics.

WHILE MAYOR, Marks arranged for late payment of a \$17,000 sewer tap-in fee for his new office building after he wrote a check that didn't clear. He wrote the check in anticipation of mortgage financing for his new office building, a stone's throw from the Farmington Hills City Hall. The expected financing fell through because of what Marks said was a mix-up over minimum occupancy requirements.

Marks later put city manager William Costick in the compromising position of deciding whether

**'The city charter empowers the city council to judge the actions of its members.'**

to put the debt on Marks' 1987 tax bill, thereby placing a lien on the property, or keeping it as an account receivable, with interest and penalties accruing.

Costick, in a decision he has acknowledged was wrong, chose to keep it a receivable when Marks assured him payment was coming.

As stressed last week, there's no reason to think Marks, who has a long history of community involvement and leadership, intended to defraud the city. But he is guilty of impropriety for not informing fellow council members about his predicament and for using his influence as mayor to ask the city manager for special treatment. Marks paid his 17½-car-old debt, including full penalties and interest, Aug. 12 — four days after it became public knowledge and after day after long-awaited financing for his building came through.

THE CITY charter empowers the city council to judge the actions of its members. But we don't think that broadly defined power is specifically sufficient enough.

A code of ethics is the answer. The Michigan Municipal League and the National League of Cities could no doubt offer insight into drafting a code that's thorough and fair.

In reaction to Marks' unusual payment arrangement, Farmington Hills councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said: "All we can work for is to try to prevent the same thing from happening."

A code of ethics would be a significant stride toward accomplishing just that.

It's crucial to remember that for a code to truly work, the public must be ever-vigilant in its quest to keep council members on an unswerving course.

## College trust

### Peace of mind for some parents

GOV. JAMES BLANCHARD and his financial whiz kid, state Treasurer Robert Bowman, struck a rich vein with the pay-now, study-later prepaid college tuition plan.

The plan, known formally as the Michigan Education Trust, promises that an investment today will result in guaranteed tuition in the future to any of Michigan's public universities and community colleges.

The public response has been impressive. In a five-day enrollment period, 82,495 people sent in \$25 along with application forms. Although these people aren't committed to participating (contracts will be sent out by Labor Day and must be returned in 60-90 days), no one else can enter the program until the next enrollment period, which could be a year away.

THERE ARE a number of reasons for the public interest: People recognize both the value of education and its steadily increasing cost; the plan seems like a tax-wise investment to those who can afford it; although the state spent nothing on advertising, the plan got loads of free publicity through newspapers and television.

Amid all this hoopla surrounding the plan, some are waving cautionary flags. Some skeptics suggest the state is overplaying its hand, that the trust fund investments cannot be assured of outdistancing tuition increases and that the legislation that created the trust did not require the state general fund to make up any deficits should the fund's investments fall short.

Some take a different tack. They say that in order to ensure the fund's solvency, the state government will browbeat universities into keeping tuition rates artificially low, thereby jeopardizing the quality of education in the state. Indeed, Oakland University this year cut a proposed 20-percent tuition increase in half as a result of Gov. Blanchard's encouragement.

Several other universities followed suit. Ironically, others suggest tuitions will grow faster than necessary because the trust fund becomes a third-party source for money.



**Right or wrong, the large public involvement in the fund makes it likely that the state legislators would bow to public pressure and make up any deficits.**

ALTHOUGH SOME of the criticism is rejected by fund spokesmen as the wailing of disgruntled financial consultants worried about lost commissions, many of the questions are legitimate and deserve the straightforward answers provided recently by Bowman and others.

Still, it should be clear in all residents' minds just exactly what the Michigan Education Trust is all about. It is a chance for peace of mind for parents who want to ensure that tuition costs will not prevent their children from attending the college of their choice.

That's it, clear and simple. It is not a guarantee that money invested now will do better than money invested in other vehicles. It is theoretically possible that tuition rates might increase annually by just 5 percent during the next 20 years. In such case, the trust will not refund the difference between tuition costs and the value of the investment. Nor should it. The fund is not a way to make money; it is a way to cover future tuition costs.

LIKEWISE, PRUDENT investors may believe they can do better on their own, particularly if they would have to borrow to meet the fund's payment. Why not invest monthly and make interest rather than borrow and pay interest? It's a valid approach for those who feel comfortable with their investment skills.

But that brings us back again to the fund's purpose. It provides for tuition (not for room and board or books), and it provides for peace of mind for parents who may plan to invest for their children's education but who, for any number of reasons, may not always be true to their goals.

The biggest question for those who participate is how well can the state live up to its part of the bargain. There are no absolute guarantees in the financial world, but the annual actuarial reviews should prevent the fund from getting dangerously out of kilter. Right or wrong, the large public involvement in the fund makes it likely that the state legislators would bow to public pressure and make up any deficits.

The real question shouldn't be: How well will the trust perform? It should do the job as advertised.

The real question is twofold: How will the state make sure that all levels of education are adequately financed, and how will youngsters afford college whose parents cannot afford the trust?



## Quayle's dilemma is our embarrassment

AMERICANS can't stand hypocrites.

And Michigan conservative standard-bearer Richard Headlee underestimates the impact of Dan Quayle's Vietnam-era military service by calling it a "tempest in a teapot."

Let that be not surprising. Heide's attitude reflects that of many people of the Vietnam generation — liberal or conservative. To many, serving in Vietnam was the stupid thing to do. Finding a dodge, especially a legal one, was considered the wise move.

For 26 years, this has been America's not so dirty secret. The Quayle incident has brought to light a time most would like to forget.

Like Headlee, most Americans want the embarrassment to go away.

This isn't a partisan issue as some claim. Most Americans, whatever their political persuasion, didn't want to have anything to do with a war they just didn't understand.

Let's face it. Nobody saw much honor in their kid being blown apart in a forgotten rice paddy. Most everybody wanted their child to go to college, get a job, have a family and do a little better than the generation before.

Let's face another fact. Nobody joined the National Guard in 1969 so they could go to Vietnam. Sure, a relative handful of Guardsmen did go. But you can bet, few had planned it that way.

**Americans loath hypocrites. Neither should the Republicans want one on the national ticket.**

And nobody holds it against these guys who were trying to find a way to survive a grisly period in American history — not even a combat veteran of the Vietnam war.

THE REEF with Dan Quayle is his hypocrisy, laden with a thick coat of arrogance.

Nobody would mind if the Republican vice presidential candidate got up and said, "I joined the National Guard to save my skin. I had something to offer this country in the future. I didn't want to jeopardize it in a war which was no threat to my country."

But Quayle lacks the courage to do that. He thinks it would be political suicide to show fear of communists in front of the conservative faithful. After all, he has built his reputation as being one of the toughest of the tough when it comes to facing off with the scary old Reds — as long as it isn't him doing the facing.

Sure, send some other kid to get his headquarters blown away. That's all right with Dan Quayle, as long as his interests are covered.

For all his youth, Quayle represents a prehistoric breed in America



**Steve Barnaby**

— a member of the elite ruling class who profits from others' sacrifices and suffering. In the case of the Vietnam War, someone else fought Quayle's anti-communist offensive.

Perhaps they were maimed or even killed. If surviving, they bear wounds Dan Quayle never will endure.

But Dan Quayle won't even acknowledge that much. He has consistently voted against counseling for Vietnam vets and has opposed research on the deadly Agent Orange, a defoliant used to ferret out his enemy, the communists, but which served only to destroy the lives of thousands of veterans and their families.

Dan Quayle's selection as a vice presidential candidate is this society's ultimate insult leveled against the soldiers of a lost war. His election would legitimize the hypocrisy this nation has carried with it for two decades.

Think about it, Dick. Americans loath hypocrites. Neither should the Republicans want one on the national ticket.

## from our readers

### Edison saga hasn't ended

To the editor:  
The article on Detroit Edison's continuing problems, which appeared Aug. 15, was more to the point.

Louise Okrusky did an excellent job in presenting a more balanced view of the problem.

Detroit Edison continues to offer lip service to the problem. Their answers never contain any commitment to resolving the difficulty on a long-term basis. We continue to be conditioned to accept poor service.

Thank you for expanding on your first story. This second article may prompt some passive victims to call city hall or Detroit Edison and ask for a consistent, quality service.

Charles W. Nagy,  
Farmington Hills

### Be careful on the road

To the editor:  
I live near the area where Pat Nuttall was killed in a car accident July 14. I was frighteningly aware of the accident and my heart goes out to her family.

The accident has only increased

my concern about the way in which motorists attack the intersection of Power Road and 11 Mile. Those going through the intersection on 11 Mile often do so well over the posted speed limit.

Motorists turning from 11 Mile onto Power often try to outrun oncoming traffic and consequently are turning much too quickly. Short of a light being installed here, something needs to be done.

There are a number of areas in Farmington and Farmington Hills where motorists take advantage of "no light" situations, and this intersection is a prime example.

Many of us in the 11 Mile-Power Road area have young children.

Motorists need to become more aware of the speed limit here and drive more responsibly. Accidents such as the one that killed Mrs. Nuttall are senseless and preventable.

Mary Leyman,  
Farmington Hills

### Bouchard's impressive

To the editor:  
If you were one of the Farmington-area residents impressed upon meeting Michael Bouchard, decided to vote for him, but never went to the polls for the Aug. 2 primary, I

urge you to make the effort next time, if given the opportunity.

Michael Bouchard leaves the impression of a man who is sincere, sensitive, intelligent and a gentleman — with all the right motives.

I had every confidence that he would select worthy objectives and seek to carry them out with moral integrity and determination.

I am encouraged that the election was so close — perhaps we can look forward to his leadership in the future.

Sherrie Stewart,  
Farmington Hills

### Contender says thanks

To the editor:  
On behalf of my husband, Tom Schellenberg, our children, and myself, I want to thank the wonderful people who helped and supported my candidacy in the recent primary election.

I am deeply grateful for all the help, encouragement, and friendship offered by so many of you. Together we have won nomination to run in the general election on Nov. 8. I will work hard during the next three months to deserve your continued support.

Joan E. Young, candidate,  
Oakland County probate judge

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