

Opinion

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

14A(F)

O&E Thursday, May 18, 1989

School vote Don't bypass board election

PSSST... There's an election, Monday, June 12 — the most significant Farmington school board election in years.

There not only are four candidates vying for two seats, the largest field in four years, but also a chalkboard-sized list of pressing issues.

About 70 percent of the taxpayers who live in the Farmington school district don't have children enrolled in it.

No matter.

Farmington Public Schools — boasting an \$85½ million budget, 27 buildings and 1,400 regular employees — is way larger than many corporations.

The 10,709-student district's responsibility is incalculable: educating our children for the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and economic rigors of the 21st century.

It must never be forgotten that the school district not only serves the public but is publicly owned. Facilities and equipment are community assets. The will of the people must prevail.

This year particularly, voters owe it to the children of our community to vote in the annual school board election.

The election will help decide a blueprint for the district — in terms of curriculum, technology, facilities and staffing — for the 1990s.

WHAT'S FACING the district in the months and years ahead? Here's a sampling:

- Negotiating with the district's five bargaining units, including the 740-member teachers union.

- Evaluating Highmeadow Common Campus, 2-year pilot program that offers an enriched curriculum and accepts students via a lottery.

- Responding to concerns about the quality and application of programming for gifted students.

- Setting attendance boundaries for the planned new west-side elementary school.

- Ranking by priority and cost previously identified building improvements.

Farmington Public Schools —
boasting an \$85½ million budget,
27 buildings and 1,400 employees
— is way larger than many
corporations.

- Assuring equally excellent learning opportunities at each school at each level to help ease fears of elitism in a common campus setting.

- Introducing the technology advisory committee's \$2.3 million plan to bring computers and other technology into the classroom.

- Preparing for possible accreditation requirements for the elementary and middle schools.

- Improving SAT and MEAP scores in a district with one of the highest per-pupil expenditures in the state.

- Lowering the dropout rate, now not much lower than Oakland County's average.

- Promoting ethnic awareness to avoid the cultural clashes marring some school districts.

- Assuring Farmington High's planned new music center lives up to its progressive billing, given a budget overrun that originally hit \$800,000.

- Resolving whether each elementary school should have a science room and whether specialists or classroom teachers should teach elementary science.

- Bracing for school finance reform so it doesn't force dismantling of district programs.

As the school year winds down, we urge the school board to rededicate itself to involving the public. Debate should be encouraged. Information should flow freely.

Meanwhile, 1-percent turnout in a school board election is deplorable. Taxpayers who don't care enough to spend a few minutes comparing the candidates and going to the polls should expect little sympathy when they challenge a school board action.

Bright lights Academic All-Stars honored

EVERY YEAR through the Observer & Eccentric All-Star program, the principals of our local high schools pick this area's best and brightest.

The All-Stars are selected based on grade point average and national college test scores.

This year, 16 students from Observer-area high schools are All-Stars. Twenty-seven others have been named runners-up. A special section in the Observer profiled them last week.

These are youths who are more than just brilliant. They are achievers in many areas of life. Very likely, they will be the leaders of tomorrow.

These are the students who prove that through discipline, determination and a lot of hard work achievement is possible in every school district — no matter how funding is determined.

Unfortunately, the Eccentric rather than the Observer All-Stars were listed here last week.

Here are the 1989 Observer All-Stars in order of ranking:

Anand K. Roy of Plymouth Salem High School, Bradd W. Swayne of Livonia Stevenson High School, Sarah R. Andrews of Salem High School, Jeremy D. Findley of Livonia Churchill High School, Alan L. MacNeill of Clarenceville High School, Matthew D. Downer of Stevenson High School, Viet "Tony" Le of Westland John Glenn High School, Erik J. Sunday of Redford Catholic Central High School, Marc W. Bockrath of North Farmington High School, Anthony A. Mikulec of Catholic Central, John D. Mueller of Redford Bishop Borgess High School, Ajay K. Arora of Farmington High School, James E. Hartnett of Canton High School, Yolanda Wu of North Farmington and Robert M. Hutchman of Livonia Franklin High School.

Weekend voting It should be given a chance

CASTING YOUR ballot on the weekend, a simple enough idea, could change the face of America — especially in your hometown elections. We believe it should be given a chance.

Middle America, the breadbasket of democracy, finds itself jealously watching as its franchise experiences a major resurgence around the world.

Argentina, a ruthless military dictatorship just a decade ago, last Sunday elected its second consecutive president by popular vote. The normally aloof political leaders of the Soviet Union recently found themselves scrambling for votes from the discontented, newly enfranchised voter.

And in the United States of America, the 20th century defender of democracy, we see voters by the millions staying home and letting a minority of the minority of registered voters make the decisions.

WE BELIEVE that the American voters, in general, are a pretty healthy bunch. Discontented, true, considering the meager pickings from candidates and poorly scripted issues. But the much vaunted changing American lifestyle also has had an impact on how we work and play. Americans do find their time at a premium.

The materialistic lifestyle, while certainly enjoyable, sways our minds away from the more patriotic pursuits. Spending and consuming, traveling, working and watching television have

taken precedent over paying attention to our governmental duties.

And in a country where democracy comes more easily than for most, it is tempting to leave the voting to those with the time and the inclination.

After all a military coup seems a faraway nightmare for most Americans.

Unfortunately, this attitude has been especially tough on those elections that count the most, the ones very close to home — school board, municipal and statewide elections.

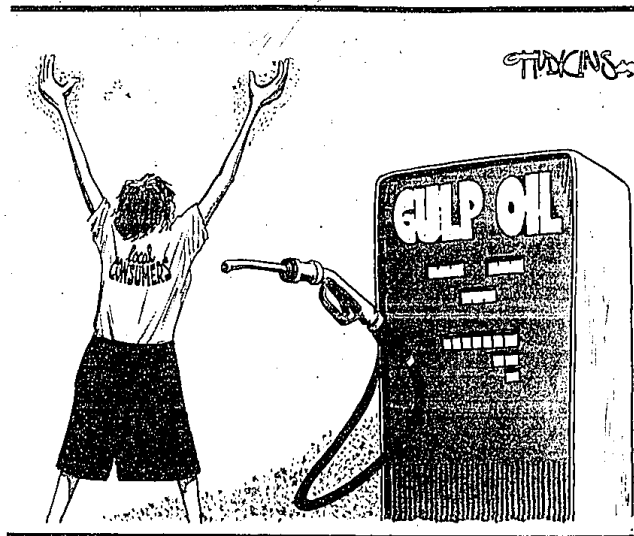
National journalists were appalled that for the first time in American history fewer than 50 percent of registered voters cast a ballot in the last presidential election.

BUT AS those of us who labor in the fields of community journalism know, voters have been staying away in much larger numbers when it comes to overseeing their communities.

Sadly, attaining a 45- or 50-percent voter turnout in a local election would be considered an overwhelming success in many cities and townships.

It is common for 3 or 4 percent of a local electorate to decide the future of an educational issue in a district or the tenure of a council member.

We suggest that tradition-bound election officials break their bonds and make it easier for voters to cast their ballots — on weekends.



Futuring: a good idea if kept in perspective

EXACTLY WHAT is futuring, the buzzword of Farmington Hills' Year 2000 Plan Steering Committee, is to identify the quality of life that residents desire into the 21st century?

Take it from a man who should know, futurist and strategic planner Edward Barlow Jr., president of Barlow Associates of St. Joseph.

"The real benefit to futuring," he said, "is to provide people the opportunity to get together and to develop what we call a shared strategic vision of the future, a way all of us can move together into the future."

So far, so good. But why should we care about the future? As Barlow succinctly put it: "We will spend the rest of our lives there."

THAT WORLD of tomorrow, Barlow said, "is going to be very different from the world we have known."

No question about that.

Which leads to his premise that the ability to change will be a key element to thriving communities in the 21st century.

"I think we need to recognize that it's OK to change," Barlow said. "I think we need to keep a positive



Bob Sklar

mental attitude about what is out there. And I think each of us has to have a zealotness about being open to information that signals the need to change."

Barlow doesn't shy from global concerns — like Michigan's average hourly manufacturing wage of \$13.70 compared to \$9.70 in Japan and \$1.85 in Korea.

But by design, he dwells on the upbeat, no doubt to make the future more inviting. "Our courage and willingness," he said, "will provide the inspiration 'to go beyond where we have been.'"

That's not only a challenge, but also an opportunity, he said.

HE'S CONFIDENT "we will create that world of the 21st century that will be exciting, peaceful and full of opportunities for everyone."

No doubt about it: I admire the hard-working, dedicated volunteers — 150 strong — who are shaping Farmington Hills' Year 2000 Plan. City manager William Costick, who thought up the strategic planning project, is rightly proud.

The volunteers seem well on the way to opening a window to the "rapid and dramatic social, economic and technological changes anticipated over the next 15 years," as Mayor Terry Sever put it.

Their mission — to, in Sever's words, "build by the year 2000 the most livable city in the state of Michigan" — is admirable. Still, I question why Farmington Hills should be more livable than anywhere else.

But I agree with Sever that it's our responsibility "to build for and to pass on to the next generation a better quality of life in Farmington Hills."

Our children are going to be the real beneficiaries of chairman Jack McDonald's Year 2000 Plan Steering Committee — at least in my mind.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

No pep rally; students walk

To the editor:

At 9:30 a.m. Friday, May 12, something happened at Farmington High School that hasn't happened since 1975.

About 250-300 angered students got up and walked out of their second-hour classes. Through the halls, through the parking lot they went, onto the bleachers of the football field.

Seventy-five percent of the faculty was unaware of this student-organized walkout.

Senior class president Bill Wootter passed the word to the senior class early Wednesday morning, May 10, when it was apparent the administration wasn't going to go through with a pep assembly scheduled for Friday.

The heart of the problem occurred in March when the administration did away with slave day (a tradition at FHS) because it was too disruptive to classrooms. So slave day was replaced with spirit week. But also a tradition at FHS is to end spirit week on Friday with an all-school pep assembly.

Assistant principal Norm Dickson commented on his perception of why there was no pep assembly. "It is very late in the season and most of the sports are going to be done soon, and teachers are preparing for finals."

After 20-30 minutes of chanting, "We want a pep rally," the students

returned to their classes.

Principal Gerald Potter addressed the students by saying, "We were planning to have an assembly all along, we were just postponing it until it is clear which teams will be going on to state competition."

Nevertheless, seniors have only two weeks left of school before they graduate.

So will the administration renege on their promise once again?

We shall see.

Lisa Rockafellow, student,
Farmington High School

Voting is a valued right

To the editor:

What are the shoes of freedom? These are the shoes of many famous men and women: Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Joan of Arc, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Soldiers of war have died for us wearing the shoes of freedom.

One pair of shoes for your feet is your voting shoes. This is a pair from the freedom variety.

Voting. A simple right that we as Americans have the right to do. Forget which party you are with. In other countries across the sea, how many can you name have this right?

Here in Farmington Hills, voting is down. Many people go before the city council and complain, yet where are they on voting day? When you go inside that voting booth and pull that lever, then you are using your best tool used in protesting.

The shoes of freedom are the hardest shoes to wear. We have so many things that need to be done. We in Farmington and Farmington Hills must send a message to our various city governments.

We can tell them that they are in office because we the voters put them there. We as voters should be able to elect the board members of the planning commission. We live in America where many died for us so that we can have this right.

In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Let Freedom Ring." When you go barefoot, think a minute, what shoes need to be filled?

You and I along with millions of other Americans can fill those shoes by voting. This is our right. So use it with pride.

Vernon K. Kieplinski,
Farmington Hills

Coverage applauded

To the editor:

On behalf of the Farmington Artists Club members, I want to thank you for allowing our last-minute publicity to appear in the Observer.

We have a large following of area residents who look forward to our exhibits. We truly appreciate the space you allow us and the support you have continued to show our organization.

A special thanks also to Loraine McClish for her continued efforts on our behalf.

Monica Leaning, president,
Farmington Artists Club

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Rich Perlberg assistant managing editor
Dick Isaham general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Aglinan president