

# Opinion

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

10A/P

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## Ceremonial

### Mayor's role serves Hills well

**T**OO MANY more-pressing concerns face Farmington Hills. We see no reason to prolong debate on Mayor Terry Sever's curious bid to make the mayor's role stronger and the term longer.

While not wavering from having a professional city manager run Farmington Hills, Sever told the city council last week he doesn't think changing mayors every year is in the city's best interest.

He prefers having the public elect the mayor to a two-year term. He's considering a petition drive to force a ballot question to achieve just that.

Mayor Sever may think "there needs to be a change." But we don't.

The good folks who penned the city charter 16 years ago felt that the council should appoint the mayor from among its members.

The charter limits the mayor to 1) presiding at council meetings, and 2) being recognized as head of city government for all ceremonial purposes and for purposes of military law.

It doesn't address the mayor's term. But tradition has limited the term to one year.

**WE OPPOSE** any charter amendment to increase the mayor's power. As we see it, the charter has accomplished what its framers set out to do in mandating a ceremonial mayor.

We're confused why Sever thinks there's confusion as to who the mayor represents: himself, the council or the public.

It's clear to us. The mayor represents Farmington Hills within the scope of authority bestowed by the city charter.

At all other times, the mayor is just one of seven council members. It's not the mayor's job to speak for the council.

Sure, the public relations thrust reduces the position's political sway. But that suits us just fine.

Any political posturing to secure government

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grants should be the product of a seven-headed decision by the city council. In our mind, that dilutes the chance of political payoffs or under-the-table politicking.

We don't think the people of Farmington Hills envision their mayor asserting "stronger political leadership."

As councilman Ben Marks, a charter commissioner, told Sever, "You are the goodwill ambassador. You don't have any political clout. The political clout comes through this city council collectively."

**SEVER ARGUES** the mayor can't crack the Michigan Municipal League's inner circle because Farmington Hills is one of the four cities with a population of 10,000 or more that changes the mayor every year.

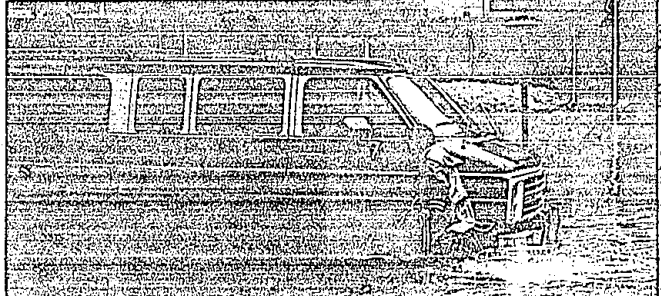
Frankly, we don't know why a two-year term would change matters. Besides, governmental relationships built by the city administration are more important.

Meanwhile, how would a mayoral veto come into play? How would the elected mayor and the city manager divvy responsibility?

We shudder to think what it would cost to run for mayor in a city where the top vote-getter in the 1987 council race spent \$11,000.

As for the tradition of a one-year term for mayor, it gives every council member a chance to be in the spotlight. And it limits the number of appointments to boards or commissions any mayor can make — impeding cronyism.

We have no objection to Farmington Hills' mayor continuing to be appointed by the city council for a one-year term.



Michael Sands, 13, navigates his bike past a subdivision in Farmington Hills after the June 21 downpour on Brandywine in Kendallwood.

## Drainage deficiencies must become priority

**THE GREAT** flood of 1989 did more than turn roads into lakes, houses into islands and basements into cesspools in Farmington Hills. It turned the tide of public trust against the city for people whose lives were turned upside down and who felt victimized by years of unfulfilled promises to improve the municipal drainage system.

So while city leaders figure out how to raise \$15-\$15 million to improve city drains, they also face having to restore their credibility.

"If I could sell my house and move to Brighton right now, I would," resident Jeannie Jones tearfully told the city council June 26.

In the aftermath of the last big flood in 1981, Farmington Hills drew a master storm drain plan, built the \$5 million Caddell Drain to ease flooding at 10 Mile and Grand River and made \$3 million in citywide drainage improvements.

But lack of major neighborhood drainage improvements has angered residents in flood-prone areas — people still wading back to normalcy from the June 21 downpour.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS** may find some money for stopgap drain repairs by revisiting the city's newly adopted \$26 million general budget.

But a long-term solution to bring the city's drainage course up to snuff would cost upwards of \$15 million — not including \$65 million in Ever-



Bob Sklar

green-Farmington Sanitary Sewer System drainage improvements.

Once City Manager William Costick defines city drainage needs, by priority and cost, within 45 days, a bond issue vote seems likely, possibly Nov. 7.

And that's none too soon for the legion of folks who sustained more than flooded basements or yards in the June 21 downpour.

It's obvious the city must direct as much stormwater as possible from draining into sanitary sewers and creating a sewage backup.

Voters defeated a capital improvement millage by a 2-1 margin in 1984, a strange defeat given a major flood just three years before.

Since then, voters have approved special taxes for parks and roads and will consider a library tax in November. The June 21 downpour hammered home the need for a capital improvement tax.

**MEANWHILE**, I wonder where the residents who say they've been complaining about poor drainage for

eight years were each year at city budget hearings.

Outcries might've hastened improved drainage and spurred working with West Bloomfield to ease upstream problems that extend below 14 Mile.

Residents must ride roughshod over the city council to assure relief as fast as possible.

Costick is right: "To have to worry about persistence of flooding is not a way to live." So is resident Dick Wagner: The time is over for "promises, promises."

Why did the city make the '80s the greatest growth decade in the city's history without major drainage repairs? I'd guess that city leaders became overconfident — an injustice city leaders must take the blame for.

For starters, the city should better publicize flood-prone areas, look into relief programs for flood victims, help determine availability of flood plain insurance, advise residents about preventing home floods and clear clogged neighborhood drains regularly.

It also must decide on a way to pay for badly needed major neighborhood drainage improvements. As a Farmington Hills taxpayer, I'm willing to pay my fair share.

## Supreme Court

### Abortion: war within the states

**T**HE UNITED STATES Supreme Court has made abortion the issue of the '80s.

Abdicating its responsibility to interpret the Constitution, the court has triggered a war over abortion rights; a war destined to be fought in each state.

In Michigan, the question is bound to divert attention from the crucial educational equity issue, which will go before voters in November. It also threatens to turn the 1990 gubernatorial and legislative contests into one-issue races.

This newspaper has reported pro-choice/pro-life confrontations in front of clinics in Livonia, Farmington Hills, Southfield and Troy.

Some of these were to call attention to last November's statewide proposition in which voters said the state could no longer fund abortions and legislative contests into one-issue races.

**BUT THAT ISSUE** actively involved only a fraction of our population; now it is destined to involve us all.

The Supreme Court has once again placed under public scrutiny the highly personal, agonizing decision a woman, and often her partner, must make.

Women of all ages and economic status have always had abortions. What Roe v. Wade did was

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allow them to end a pregnancy without breaking the law. As a result of Roe v. Wade women have been able to have safer, more affordable abortions.

This newspaper has consistently taken a pro-choice position.

But it will take more than lip service to head off and defeat the well-run, well-financed pro-life forces in Michigan which firmly believe they are the advocate of the unborn child.

Pro-choice residents of the our suburban communities are well suited to take a leadership role. Blessed with education, resources and political savvy, they can help convince state government that the constitutional right to have a child, or not, must be retained for today's young women and those to come.

## Flag, execution laws conflict

**N**EVER were the divided attitudes of the American people so evident as in recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings on the flag and the death penalty.

With the court shifting allegiances in 5-4 rulings each time, shock reverberated throughout the country. On one hand the justices ruled that, despite the esteem in which we hold the red, white and blue, an avowed communist had the right to burn the flag at the Republican convention in 1984.

In the other conservative ruling, the justices ruled that teens aged 16 and 17 and mentally retarded adults can be executed.

Supporting the flag ruling were justices Anthony M. Kennedy, Harry Blackmun, Thurgood Marshall, Antonin Scalia and William Brennan in the majority.

The majority ruling on the death penalty decisions were Scalia, Chief Justice William Rehnquist, Byron White, Sandra Day O'Connor and Kennedy.

itself from veterans groups to congressmen. The decision literally spanned both sides of the political spectrum.

Finally President Bush called for a constitutional amendment opposing flag burning, something that would take two-thirds approval in both houses of Congress and by 38 state legislators.

Despite their sincerity, these protests are misguided. When we say we honor Old Glory as much as anyone else, we honor not a swatch of cloth but the meaning behind the flag. That meaning is the liberty inherent in our doctrine of freedom of speech to burn the very symbol for which it stands, even if the protester is a complete jerk for doing so.

We are, however, still reeling from the court's decision that teens ages 16 and 17 and mentally retarded adults can be executed.

Scalia, the only justice to vote in the majority on both decisions, wrote: "In determining what standards have evolved, we have looked not to our own conceptions of decency, but to those of modern American society as a whole."

The diverse American society bows its head in shame.

### 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.

#### Family offers public thanks

To the editor:

The family of Stacy Elizabeth Brown wishes to express their sincere thanks and deepest appreciation to friends, neighbors, Cloverdale School and staff for their prayers, flowers, cards, food and words of comfort during our time of bereavement.

A special thanks to the Community EMS - Farmington Hills fire squad, Dr. Ronald Lagerfeld and the emergency room staff of Botsford General Hospital for their valiant efforts; to Dr. Edward T. Konno and Thayer-Rock Funeral Home for their special assistance in services with dignity and consolation; and for all the memorials to Rett Syndrome Association.

God bless each and everyone.  
Douglas and Bernetta Brown, Scott, Brandi and Kristin, Farmington Hills

#### Porn stance is infuriating

To the editor:

Now you've done it, Steve Barnaby — infuriated every parent who has (or has had) a teenager (June 28).

Obviously you don't have children that age or you would know how utterly impossible it is to monitor their every waking moment. I even wonder if you somehow skipped from childhood to full-grown adulthood yourself because you obviously don't remember what it was like.

Perhaps some parents are careless and leave pornographic material lying about, but most don't, and

probably most don't even have it on the premises.

Once when my husband reached a "certain age," a friend gave him a Playboy subscription as a joke. He kept them in a file drawer with business papers, but one day I rearranged our 14-year-old son's furniture and found a copy stuffed where he didn't think I'd find it. Short of locking them up, you're not going to keep an inquisitive kid from peeking.

Influencing by example is fine, and we can teach our young moral standards until we're red in the face. But peer pressure is a mighty force not easily contended with. And normal, bright kids have lots of curiosity.

What's the difference between using a minor to "sting" someone selling hard-core pornography to a minor or someone selling liquor to a minor? I feel anything that can't be legally sold to a minor, if it can be freely sampled before a sale, should be behind the counter and out of sight. This has nothing to do with freedom of speech; this has to do with a harmful substance.

We don't see open samples of liquor or tobacco products lying about so that anyone can try them first, then if they decide to buy, they must have the money and proof of age. What's the difference between a life taken or ruined by a drunk driver or a rapist?

I applaud the Farmington Hills Police Department for trying to keep our community a fit environment in which to raise a family. Bravo to the citizens crime prevention advisory committee — keep up the good work. Three cheers for Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer — keep up the "hol" war.

All my applause to the Farmington Observer for its "hard-core porn" editorial.

Bea Scaglione, Farmington Hills

#### Infant death rate a shock

To the editor:

It is a national disgrace that 40,000 infants die each year before their first birthday. The U.S. ranks 19th among the industrialized countries of the world in infant mortality rate.

Yet we know that low birth weight is the major cause of infant mortality, something we can do something about through primary health care for pregnant women in poverty.

In Michigan, WIC serves 62 percent of those eligible, but we should do better for our poor women and children.

Suggest to your readers they write to U.S. Rep. William Broomfield to increase the funding for WIC in 1990 in the amount of \$150 million, which will serve another 200,000 poor women and children in the U.S.

For every dollar we put into the WIC program today, we save \$3 in hospital costs for low birth-weight newborns. Let's put tax dollars into our national treasure — our children.

Dr. S.W. Cameron, Farmington Hills

#### Share opinions

While the Observer expresses its opinions on the editorial page, we always leave space open for our readers to express their ideas.

Submitting a letter to the editor for publication is easy. We ask that letters be typewritten or printed legibly.

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