

# Opinion

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## One more time? Case for another millage try

**T**RY AGAIN? Hair of the dog that bit you? Will the second time be a charm? If at first you don't succeed...

There are some parents in the Farmington School District who are thinking these days that school millage requests, like love, might just be lovelier the second time around.

Sure, the school district's request for an additional 2.7 operating mills and an additional mill for capital improvements went down in flames on Feb. 5 with more than 6,000 naysayers striking the collective match.

And Superintendent Michael Flanagan said the district wouldn't try again if the proposals failed. Instead, there will be deep cuts in school programs and personnel.

But proponents of the millage increases have got to be pleased. Waging a backluster campaign themselves, while meeting major league opposition from conservative Richard Headlee and his corporation, they still managed to get more than 4,000 voters to say yes to a tax increase in a definite anti-tax climate.

**MORE THAN 10,000** jammed the polling places (remember the long lines and angry people?), as 21 percent of the registered voters turned out.

"In any other time in our history, 4,000 votes would have won," noted Flanagan on the morning after. It was indeed worth noting.

So how about it? Ask again for the additional money that educators say is needed to replace millions of dollars "recaptured" by the state?

The word around the community is that the parents who were the hard-core millage supporters want to try again, but Flanagan and school trustees don't.

Now, we can just hear some of the more strident anti-millage folks sneering, "Yeah, and there's more where that came from if you'd care to try again." But, still, we feel there is a strong

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case for trying again.

Maybe the members of the next school millage committee will learn from past mistakes. Maybe they'll run a little smarter campaign the second time around. For example:

**MAYBE THEY'LL** realize that, if they expect to win, they have to plead their case to the opposition, not to themselves. That's right... identify the no voters — be they seniors or singles or whoever — and do their best selling job on those naysayers.

It's no good having millage supporters Sally Smith and Bonnie Jones convince each other of the rightness of their cause. Instead, they need to carry the word to the infidels and convert as many as possible.

And then there's this question of the great millage debate that never happened, but certainly should have. The pro-millage people all but sealed their fate by refusing to debate the last time.

When Patrick Anderson or Richard DeVries issues a challenge to debate the need for a millage increase, proponents should jump at the chance. If their cause is truly just, what have they to fear?

And we think it's the duty of the school board members or the superintendent to do the talking for the schools... the state attorney general's opinion on the subject be damned.

If the pro-millage supporters will be a bit more open and honest about the need for the additional money in a future campaign, maybe the district's voters will be more generous.

## Not real School choice offers no hope

**S**CHOOLS OF CHOICE could improve public education — if the concept was based somewhere in reality.

But it's not, and taxpayers should be wary of politicians bearing the gift which they claim schools of choice to be.

Unfortunately, too many schools of choice supporters believe that the strength of the concept is based on the competitive model.

Erasing public school attendance boundaries, they say, will allow parents to choose "good" schools for their youngsters, while forcing "bad" ones to make changes.

While that sounds good on its face, the reality is that the so-called "bad" schools have no way to make a comeback, no way to raise the funds necessary to operate in a classical American competitive marketplace.

"Bad" schools would simply fail and the "good" schools would soon be overcrowded, overcrowded and simply not as good.

Reality also dictates that the temptation for some high school coaches would be just too much to resist. Recruiting students for their athletic prowess could become an epidemic which would be difficult to eradicate.

**PRACTICE ALSO** suggests that parents will make choices on factors other than quality, putting perfectly true faculties at risk of being withdrawn from the educational loop.

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A preliminary study from Minnesota, a leader among schools of choice states — indicates choice is based more on convenience than academics. The study indicated many parents based their choice more on nearness to their workplace... or babysitter... than on school programs.

Nothing there, there's nothing sacred about attendance boundaries. There's also no reason why area school districts can't work together, as well as with nearby colleges and universities, to offer challenging new educational programs.

Already, Oakland County is drafting plans for a regional high school for math and science. While that approach holds some promise, it could only benefit a few students.

Instead of creating new schools, we'd much prefer programs that make better use of resources already at hand.

proposals put the state's welfare system with a planned 17 percent decrease, beginning Feb. 23. But can we blame also is within Engler's rhetoric, which would adversely affect almost a quarter million children.

And how many parents are enough? "Who will start them?" Is the National Guard really come to pace the catwalks in the place of out-of-work prison guards?

If Engler is really serious about saving, let him check out the millions wasted on a bloated state police bureaucracy and a National Guard system which is simply a waste of money.

These are not easy problems, nor is this list all inclusive. But doing a good job fixing any of the above would give legislators something to point to next time voters roll around. Perhaps if concrete ideas are made, and legislators propose to do more closely aligned with the end of living instead of wishful thinking, they'll earn an upgrade.

## Fresh look Legislators must earn raises

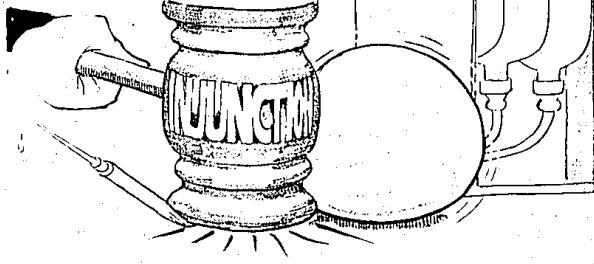
**W**ERE GLAD Michigan's legislators listened to the people who put them in Lansing and overwhelmingly rejected their proposed pay raises.

That's one less conflict to interfere at the public at a time when the state is struggling with a massive deficit.

When the raises first were proposed we suggested here that members of the state Senate and House can have them, provided they earn them in performance equals percentage increase. Legislators now have a year before their next reviews.

I think others who have poured over the remnants of Jim Blanchard's administration looking for clues on how to proceed, we think it's better to go into this with a fresh approach. Engler is in his overall mandate is lower property taxes to than further sullying an already pathetic problem throughout the state's school districts.

SPECIFICALLY, ENGLER'S CURRENT



## Educators must think of all our kids' needs

**WITHIN THE LAST** two weeks, we have witnessed defeated attempts to hike school taxes in two of our communities which traditionally support their schools' requests for money.

West Bloomfield schools lost in an unusual tie vote. (A recount showed malfunctioning of voting machines in two precincts, so those voters are being repolled.) Two proposals by Farmington schools lost resoundingly.

Both saw organized opposition spring from unlikely sources as they attempted to make up revenues lost when the state reallocated funds to needier districts.

Within the West Bloomfield area, the Orchard Lake City Council went on record against the proposed tax increase. In the Farmingtons, Richard Headlee, whose insurance company is one of Farmington Hills' largest taxpayers, waged an all-out campaign against both tax hikes.

It is unfortunate to see one political body come out against another. It is also unfortunate to see one wealthy businessman have more clout than one vote in an election.

**BUT IT IS** also true that to some degree, educators who preside over wealthy schools have deflected coming. Their view of education extends only to the borders of their district. In a field that should be rampant with

ideas, they confine their vision.

Now that they too are hurting, perhaps they will see that many children in this state have never had the programs they say they are forced to cut.

Those school districts with the biggest problems — children from dysfunctional or poverty-ridden homes — need more money per student than districts with a higher percentage of stable, comfortable families.

But what exists is just the opposite.

What happens if the college-bound student at Livonia Stevenson High School doesn't get that computer class? Well, guess what, he takes it in college. What happens when that non-college student at Redford Union (which by the way just passed a "millage-renewal" doesn't get the computer class he needs? He may just miss out on a way to earn a living.

But these days, schools aren't only in the business of teaching. With the breakdown of the family, they are also into counseling — for substance abuse, parental neglect, teen pregnancy. Probably all school counselors have a heavy load these days. But poorer districts, which may have a higher percentage of problems, have fewer human resources too.

**THE CRY** of the wealthier districts has been — raise the level of

**Judith Berne**

state aid for the poorer district don't take away from us. That doesn't make it any more.

What we need is a united effort of unselfish educators and school boards to apply their very own minds to the issue.

It is not only a question of yes, but it is also a question of approach.

One example of a creative son is the proposal for an Oakland County high school for math and science. It would draw students from districts across the county — a K-12 Tech in Detroit or Bronx Sci in New York.

But Bloomfield Hills Superintendent W. Robert Dackling, who normally respects said "70" think it will offer things outside can't get now.

"Our kids" It's time to reach all of our kids.

Judith Berne is assistant managing editor for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*.

## Engler puts his stamp on state government

**NANCY MARSHALL** sank into a chair and sighed, "It's great to have weekends again."

She does appropriations subcommittee work for state Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, but he loaned her services to Gov. John Engler during the transition from the outgoing Blanchard administration.

"We put in 15-hour days, seven days a week," Marshall said of the transition of years.

Anne Mervenne, a former aide to state Sen. Doug Cruse, R-Troy, now works for Engler and provided the numbers. Engler had 1,000 jobs to fill, several hundred of them posts that James Blanchard didn't fill in his final year in office.

**USUALLY IT** takes a couple of years to get hold of the bureaucracy because seats on boards have staggered terms.

Engler has been able to put his stamp on state government more in a month than most governors can do in a couple of years.

One reason is that Blanchard was typically slow to fill vacancies. And in 1990 Blanchard let a lot of the work slide because Engler, in control of the Senate, would have been able to make political inroads at will.

**BLANCHARD'S AGRICULTURE** director bailed out when Engler nearly replaced that body. The new commission picked former congressman Bill Schutte, the 1990 U.S. Sen-



**Tim Richard**

ate candidate. Ditto at Natural Resources.

Engler made four new appointments of six seats on the Transportation Commission. The governor, rather than the panel, appoints the department director, but it would have made no difference. Engler's choice, Patrick Nowak, is in.

That was why the Marshalls, the Mervennes and Engler's inner circle were working 100-hour weeks.

**ENGLER HIMSELF** personally knows more Michiganders than any human being I've met.

The former farm boy, despite some middle-aged pudginess, has a nearly inexhaustible supply of energy. He was the only prominent Republican to show up at Bill Lucas' 1983 inaugural as Wayne County executive. He spent part of a holiday in Michigan, soap kitchen, he would call Democratic Wayne County officials from his car phone and inquire about their problems.

After consulting hundreds of GOP leaders, Engler virtually dictated the 1990 tax act, and did it so skillfully that there wasn't a mutter of protest at the state convention.

So filling 1,000 jobs in two days became do-able.

**ENGLE DEPARTED** from decades of practice in appointing general university boards. Gov. try to pick alumni of the university. I asked him why.

"I suppose I was conscious of not being conscious of it," Engler replied. "I chose to go for the best talent available. I thought the core of many university boards was that there be prompt appointments of superbly qualified individuals. Many are people I've known since aware of over the years."

So Engler tapped University of Detroit graduate I. Brooks Driscoll for the Oakland County board. IBM vice president on Sternberg of Bloomfield Hills a graduate of Pomona College also Harvard business school, John DeMatta of Northville, a U-D alum, for Eastern, and so.

Whether you care for his list priorities or not, this guy Engler works.

Tim Richard reports on topical implications of state governmental news.

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