

Opinion

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School races

Lines we'd rather not hear

HERE IT IS the month of April. The crucifixes are popping up, it's probably raining... and the school board candidates are plotting strategy and hunting votes for that big Monday, June 10.

The filing deadline was Monday and there are races in the Farmington and Clarenceville school districts.

But, before the rhetoric gets too steamy and the politics too thick in this election stew, let's make one thing perfectly clear.

Any school board candidate, incumbent or challenger, who says, "I'm interested in quality education for our kids," or anything close to it, can just about kiss off our endorsement.

Of course you're interested in quality education for the precious kiddies. Aren't we all? That's almost a given.

Now go figure a way to pay for that quality education in this atmosphere of an open-handed school establishment and tight-fisted voters and state governments, and you're our kind of candidate.

JUST AS STUPID as the old "I'm-for-quality-

education" slogan is the incumbent's familiar line, "Everything is just peaches-and-cream perfect. He-elect me and I'll keep it that way."

Somewhat, we don't think we'll be hearing that one too much this year in the Farmington District where a millage failure in February has split the community into hateful factions.

The millage going down in flames, combined with massive cuts in state aid to local schools, has resulted in drastic cuts in the program.

And, challengers, gird yourselves for a tough question or two if you come on with that line, "We have to live up to our fiscal responsibility."

Those kind usually shut up (or start to mumble) real quick when you ask exactly how we can live up to our fiscal and educational responsibilities at the same time.

"No, this is the 1990s in Michigan where, educationally speaking, the suburban 'haves' have less, and those who can do for themselves had better start. It is, unfortunately, a time for doing more with less.

Please, candidates, tell us how to make it happen.

Is Edison a tree-lover?

SO DETROIT Edison, our electric utility, is coming out to Farmington's Flanders Elementary this week to give a presentation on trees.

Let's see, the Edison folks will be planting trees, talking about the benefits of trees, listing products made from trees... and, oh yes, possibly giving instruction in the use of a chainsaw on trees.

Not to be flippant about this — we're sure the youngsters will enjoy the program and we're happy Edison puts it on — but the irony of Edison talking up trees in the Farmington area hasn't escaped us. We wonder if Mary Judge was invited to Flanders.

Judge is a Farmington Hills resident who be-

came incensed when an Edison crew hacked up some 50-year-old trees that she loved. She said she complained to Edison and got little sympathy.

Hers was one complaint about none-too-careful tree trimming that goes on out here. There were others.

Edison trims trees it fears will cause power outages when branches fall on electric lines. It would seem that trees are the bane of the existence of Detroit Edison or any other outfit that strings wires across the land.

Yet, here is Edison speaking of the wonders of trees to our children. We're happy they're here, but sometimes we have trouble hearing the talk over the buzz of the chainsaws.

Striking out

Urban sprawl feeds on move

THERE ARE many unanswered questions, but we encourage Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara in his efforts to keep the Detroit Tigers downtown.

Keeping the Tigers in Detroit is in everyone's best interest.

It's in the best interest of the city. Losing the major league baseball team would severely damage Detroit's redevelopment.

It's in best interest of the suburbs. Keeping the Tigers in the city would go a long way toward halting urban sprawl.

It's in the best interest of fans. Downtown Detroit is easily accessible, even from the most far-flung corners of our sprawling metropolitan region. The objective is to show Tiger management it's in their best interest, too.

McNamara is trying to do just that. Armed with county bonds, McNamara is trying to convince the Tigers to remain in the city.

The county executive is promoting an ambitious plan that would tie stadium development to redevelopment in its surrounding neighborhood.

Thus far, many details remain unexplained. It isn't known whether Tiger Stadium would remain, or whether the Tigers would move to a new stadium elsewhere in the city.

Likewise, it isn't entirely known how the project would be financed.

But based on what we've heard to date, we believe McNamara is on the right track.

Several years ago, before any stadium plans had been proposed, we strongly expressed our preference for private financing. That is still our preference.

But we realize this isn't a perfect world. Even if the Tigers were to move somewhere else — Washtenaw County, for instance — it's extremely likely public money would be used to expand

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roads and add water and sewer lines.

The end result, more urban sprawl, is hardly in the best interest of our region.

The financing plan promoted by McNamara, using a ticket surcharge and, possibly, a hotel/motel tax appears a lesser evil.

That doesn't mean we have no concerns about using public financing for stadium construction or renovation.

We know its track record isn't good.

Toronto's new Skydome is already running heavily in the red, even though its turnstiles have been whirling with a record number of baseball fans. Likewise, the sorry tale of the Pontiac Silverdome hardly needs retelling.

McNamara, however, has built his career on fiscal responsibility, on balancing county budgets after years of debt.

At least to this point, it appears unlikely he would risk sending the county back into debt — even for a project as important as this.

So, in baseball terms, we're giving McNamara the signal to swing away.

He might strike out.

But he just might hit a home run — for the city, for the fans and for our region.

Insurers must cover adoptees

STATE SENATORS in the Commerce Committee have a chance to help Michigan make good on President George Bush's pledge to promote adoption over abortion.

The Michigan House of Representatives has passed three bills sponsored by Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, to remove an impediment to adoption. The bills would require health insurers to cover adopted children the day they enter their new homes — the same as birth children.

Currently, health insurers require a one year waiting period after an adoptee enters the home. They also deny coverage for pre-existing medical conditions for adoptees, although children born to the family are covered. All kids should be treated the same — and will be, if Berman's bills pass the Senate.

One-fourth of couples adopt children with "special needs" — emotionally or physically impaired, minorities, siblings that need to be adopted together. It doesn't follow that those kids will be medically fragile — just a few.

Where they are adopted in well-to-do suburbs or rural areas where medical services are scarce, it may be difficult to find a practitioner who accepts Medicaid patients.

House Bills 4119-21 are back in the Senate Commerce Committee where, in the 1990 shuffle, similar bills died. Hopefully his panel will get them passed with bipartisan support.

Our leaders may disagree on tax cuts and spending, but they ought to agree that adoption is good. Especially for kids.



Federal tax cut game hurts states' budgets

QUESTION: Is our state budget crisis unique to Michigan?

Answer: Nope. Lots of other states are in big trouble. In fact, some experts say that today's national, state and local budget crisis are the worst since the Great Depression.

Question: Michigan's budget is \$1.1 billion in the hole, according to Gov. John Engler. Is Michigan's crisis worse than other states?

Answer: Not at all. Michigan is only one of a dozen states where the 1991 shortfall is more than 10 percent of the total budget. Others: California, Massachusetts, Maryland, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Mississippi, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia and Connecticut.

Question: How did things get like that?

Answer: Ah! There's a good one.

A PARTIAL answer, of course, is the recession, which has cut tax receipts over all. But there's another very important cause, one that most politicians in Washington would rather keep hidden.

What really happened in the 1980s was a federal-state tax cut shell game in which the states came out losers.

Here's how: Under the spell of Reagan rhetoric, Congress cut income tax rates, especially for those with big incomes. Then the pea of raising taxes to pay the bills was quietly switched from the feds to state and local government.

The top federal income tax rate dropped from 70 percent in 1981 to

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31 percent this year. Meanwhile, state and local taxes soared from 17 percent of national income to 19 percent. Last year's total state-local tax revenue exceeded federal receipts.

To make matters worse, the feds kept dumping program requirements on the states but refused to fund them. Take Medicaid, which helps pay for health care for the poor. Medicaid took \$3 of every \$100 that Michigan spent in 1970, while it could take as much as \$15 this year. But the feds contribute no more.

And you wondered why the taxpayer revolts are taking place in the states? Engler knows. His last-minute tax score TV ads played a role in defeating former Gov. James Blanchard.

WAIT, THERE'S more. Not only were taxes shifted from federal to state and local units during the 1980s, but there was also a change in incidence. That's a polite way of saying the middle class and poor were gored while the rich made out good.

Why? Because the federal income tax — the one that decreased — is basically progressive. The more you



Philip Power

earn, the higher percentage you pay. But state and local taxes — on property and sales, for example — are regressive. They fall as hard or harder on the poor.

Result: a massive, largely unnoticed shift in tax policy in America over the past 10 years. Taxes have shifted from federal to state and local, have increased overall and have become more regressive.

This is the real reason why Gov. Engler is so vulnerable to charges that he's "mean spirited" in his budget proposals. Not only is he proposing to cut back on a large range of human services such as job training and welfare which benefit the middle class and poor, but he is also in office at a time when national tax policy is reopening the old debate over sticking it to the working people while the rich get off easy.

This may not always be apparent in the daily headlines. But in a state like Michigan with a populist tradition where most folks describe themselves as "working people," it spells long range trouble.

Philip Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

from our readers

How would the money be spent?

To the editor:

I would like to join others in the community who are asking for a definitive statement as to how the requested eight-year half-mill tax increase for parks and recreation would be used.

The conflicting statements reported in the April 1 Farmington Observer makes it increasingly important that the city council make it very clear as to the intended use of these funds.

My own confusion illustrates the point. I cannot see using our tax dollars to create a passive park from the Polte-MDOT property.

This would benefit only a few residents, where sports fields on the property would benefit thousands, from participants to spectators.

The best that can be said of a passive park in this area is that it would provide a beautiful back yard for residents of Quaker Valley, subsidized by the rest of us in the city.

I don't want to see why tax dollars spent in that fashion. But how am I to vote on the increase? What is City Council's intent?

I urge the city council to issue a statement defining intended use of

this tax increase so that the people in the community can determine whether to vote for or against the proposal.

Kenneth F. Perrin,
Farmington Hills

Say 'yes' to park millage

To the editor:

The May 7 election will be another opportunity for the voters of Farmington Hills to stand behind the city motto — "Tradition and Progress."

I am a resident of the community of Farmington Hills, and I stress community because a community is where people live, work, go to school, shop, interact with each other and pursue their lives.

In my opinion, there are a few squeaky wheels in the community who cannot see the forest for the trees.

If you want to commune with nature, there are a number of federal, state and metro parks in the area. They are set aside for the purpose of maintaining their pristine nature. People are encouraged to commune with nature there.

The pristine nature of Farmington Hills was compromised with the first human settlements. It has now blossomed into a community for human life.

The parks commission over the years has proven that it can develop a plan and implement that plan to best suit the needs of the majority of the community.

The new master plan was clearly developed as a result of many months of community input, not just a whim of the commissioners.

The squeaky wheels are entitled to their opinions, but the silent majority helped develop the master plan. It is time to allow the commissioners to do the job they were appointed to do.

In the best interest of the community, vote yes for the parks millage renewal on May 7.

Richard Smigelski,
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Submitting a letter to the editor for publication is easy. Letters should be typewritten, printed legibly and kept to 300 words. Letters must be signed and include the address of the sender.

Letters should be mailed to the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

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