

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336

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Oxford Street

Hospital traffic keep off!

SCORE ONE for the Oxford Street residents in their battle with Botsford Hospital. Little folks do occasionally win when they band together... and arm themselves with the proper research.

It would appear that a group of very determined people in southeast Farmington Hills has won a round in its fight to close a gate through which hospital emergency vehicles pass to reach their street, Oxford Street.

Now Oxford Street is no glittering thoroughfare. It's just a residential lane in what used to be known as Section 38. Oxford has the misfortune of running hard by the west side of Botsford General Hospital, which is expanding to the tune of \$30 million these days.

For a long time, emergency and other hospital traffic has passed through the gate and onto Oxford Street, residents say, making life generally unpleasant, not to mention dangerous considering the speeding ambulances.

Enough of this, residents said at a recent Farmington Hills City Council meeting. Give us our street back. Lock that gate!

THEY'RE GETTING their wish: As of July 30, Botsford Hospital must permanently close the gate.

So credit the feisty residents with a sound job of research... and debit the hospital administration for not supporting its case very well.

Residents came to the council meeting armed with copies of stories from the old Farmington Enterprise, the forerunner of this newspaper. The 1982 articles proved, residents claimed, that Botsford was never given use of a driveway from the facility onto Oxford Street.

Massie Kurzeja, representing the Olde Town-Meadowbrook Heights Homeowners Association, said the stories about the rezoning for the hospital stressed that there would only be one entrance, that on busy Grand River.

The city council must play a strong role in seeing that Botsford plays fair with its neighbors.

Hospital administrator Gerson Cooper didn't seem impressed with the residents' research ("No, I don't want to see an article from a newspaper," he said when it was offered to him at the council meeting), although he didn't present much of an argument for keeping the gate open.

Cooper continued to insist that "hospital records" show that the facility has always had two entrances. Cooper did not provide those records at the meeting.

NOW THIS missive should not be considered a knock on Botsford Hospital or its planned expansion. A well-run hospital is an integral part of any community. Farmington Hills and surrounding towns are better for Botsford's being here. And we realize that hospital traffic — including the emergency vehicles that are on lifesaving missions — must have safe and easy access to the facility.

However, if the hospital is going to be operated in this crowded end of town, it must be done with a care for its neighbors, including the little people of Oxford Street.

And the Farmington Hills Council must play a strong role in seeing that Botsford does play fair with its neighbors.

We're just not sure this is happening... not when a community leader like Massie Kurzeja says: "We are under the impression that Botsford has us under the Ambassador Bridge syndrome. They (Botsford) have changed our way of life." No, the Oxford gate must remain locked.

Law unfair

Bill may alter drug sentencing

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to uphold a Michigan law imposing a mandatory life sentence with no parole for drug possession will not be the last word on the subject.

Despite the ruling, the Michigan Supreme Court could still change the law, and a bill introduced by State Rep. William R. Bryant Jr., R-Grosse Pointe Farms, could give judges discretion when sentencing those convicted of possessing drugs.

Bryant's bill calls for a minimum five-year sentence while retaining the maximum penalty of life in prison.

The high court upheld the so-called "650 law," which requires a life sentence for possession of 650 grams of cocaine (about a pound and a half), by only one vote, 5-4.

THE CASE ON which the court ruled involved an arrest in Canton of a first-offender who had 680 grams of cocaine at the time, just over the minimum amount to be charged under the statute. Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson, who argued for the law, said the stiff penalty would "send a message" to drug dealers. It's the wrong message.

The court's vote serves as a constitutional OK, but it isn't a ringing endorsement of a law that puts small-time drug dealers on an equal footing with first-degree murderers.

The usually conservative Justice Byron White voted against the law as cruel and unusual punishment. That's just what it is.

The "650 law" allows no judicial discretion in sentencing. It's life with no parole.

Of 125 prisoners now serving life terms for drugs in Michigan, about half are first-time offenders. Drug kingpins, who can afford the best lawyers, plead to a lesser charge. So the law hasn't put a dent in the illegal drug trade even

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though it's been on the books for more than 12 years.

THAT PRESSURES judges not to sentence criminals to overcrowded prisons, adding to the likelihood that someone committing a violent crime will be back on the streets sooner or never go to prison.

Add to that the cost of housing prisoners for the rest of their lives. A conservative estimate is \$20,000 a year for each prisoner. Since the majority found guilty of drug possession are young, there could be a lot of expensive years ahead for taxpayers.

Bryant said the high court's decision to uphold the law doesn't mean the state's high court will follow suit. And unlike the U.S. Supreme Court, the state court has no time limit.

If the court does not rule on the "650 law" in the near future, the Legislature will take it up later this year, Bryant said.

The current law won't "get tough" with big drug dealers. It will continue to be unfair to small-time criminals and taxpayers.

Bryant's law is more in line with drug laws in other states and would give judges the latitude to base the sentence on the offender's crime and previous record. It would take the crime out of the political arena and put it back into the hands of judges.

First Amendment protects right to peaceful assembly

THE ELOQUENT words rang out, electrifying the 250,000 people who had assembled on the mall between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.

"I have a dream..." It was August 1963, and Martin Luther King Jr. was speaking at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

King's life exemplifies the First Amendment right to peacefully assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances.



SOME 200 years before the March on Washington, representatives of colonies assembled to petition for the redress of grievances against Great Britain and later to declare independence.

The rights of assembly and petition have protected many reform movements in this country, including the civil rights campaign that brought King to the nation's capital.



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Lock up

The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision on mandatory prison terms for drug offenders doesn't mean the matter is all locked up for

the state of Michigan. For our view of the situation, see the editorial on the lower left side of this page.

Rights to free speech get new breath of life

A little bit of life was breathed into First Amendment rights recently when the State Board of Education supported, in a split vote, a bill that would make students full and equal citizens of the United States.

In these days when far too many folks would rather see freedom of speech just go away, we must celebrate this 5-3 vote.

Hard as it is to believe, many elected officials and school employees believe students should be forbidden to practice the tenets of the First Amendment.

State Rep. Lynn Jondahl is trying to do something about that. In what at first appeared to be a futile uphill battle, the Okemos Democrat introduced a bill that would protect students' right to publish, conduct theatrical productions, post messages on bulletin boards, circulate petitions and wear political buttons.

After getting off to a slow start, the bill has gained support from

some of the more sane minds in Lansing. Locally, Farmington Republican State Rep. Jan Dolan has thrown her support to this free speech concept as well as Democrats Justine Barnes of Westland, James Kosteva of Canton and Maxine Bertram of Southfield.

On the Senate side, West Bloomfield Republican David Honigman has introduced a twin to Jondahl's House bill.

Over at the State Board, dissenters Marilyn Lundy of Grosse Pointe and Grand Rapids businessman Dick DeVos represent some real pre-revolutionary mentalities.

Listen to what Marilyn Lundy has to say: "Freedom of speech stops sometimes. We give too much leeway or license to young people," she said recently.

THAT'S PRETTY scary stuff. For years we've been learning that age discrimination is a hindrance to our freedoms. But Ms. Lundy thinks otherwise.

We can only wonder if she has an upper limit to her age discrimination. In other words, if you can be too young to practice democratic rights, can you be too old?

Sounds silly. But if you use the log-



Steve Barnaby

ic for one, you certainly can extend it to the other. After all, our abilities do wane as we age.

Lundy and DeVos are supported in their efforts to keep student free speech suppressed by that spineless group of decision makers, the Michigan Association of Secondary Principals. This is the case even though the bill clearly states that school boards and administrators would be fully protected from both criminal and civil liability.

It is frightening to believe that those bureaucrats responsible for our children's education would rather teach the merits of censorship than the responsibilities of free speech.

Steve Barnaby is the managing editor of the 12 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

from our readers

Our schools must improve

To the editor:

This is a reply to Karen Sue Morgan's letter. "She's happy with schools," on July 11, 1991.

Morgan is "pleased with the superior education Farmington Public Schools continue to deliver. This quality is evidenced in part by the awards our students receive locally, regionally and nationally, the acceptance of our students to prestigious universities throughout the country."

Allow me to point out, Farmington Public Schools, just like all other schools, enrolls students that excel in academics, the arts, sports, etc. These students would win awards and enter prestigious universities regardless of where they attended grades K-12.

The more important question is, what percentage of the graduating senior class advances to institutions of higher learning?

Morgan continues, "It seems a shame to me that someone who does not have a child of school age as yet feels confident to call those schools 'weak.' Perhaps the term 'weak' applies to the opinion — writer's knowledge of the subject at hand."

FOR THE RECORD, the letter Morgan is replying to makes no reference to any "child." The fact that I

do not know or have never met Karen Sue Morgan leads me to ask where is she getting such confidential information?

In response, I hold a bachelor of arts in education from St. Mary's University of San Antonio, Texas (cum laude). I am an experienced, certified teacher, having taught in both public and private institutions. Furthermore, I do not believe parenting a school age child is indicative of successfully evaluating a school district. If such were the case, six of the present seven school board members would not qualify to sit on the board.

Morgan states, "All the neighbors" spoken of in the opinion letter do not choose to send their children to private schools. In fact, in the neighborhood referred to, 21 of 29 children attend public schools."

Again, original letter makes no reference to any neighborhood. I chair the directory committee for my subdivision and have not found any Karen Sue Morgan, "parent of several children currently attending Farmington Public Schools" residing in my subdivision.

My subdivision consists of 200 homes. It would be a gross exaggeration to claim that a subdivision of 200 homes houses 29 children. Of "the neighbors" I was referring to, again these are my neighbors: 29 children attend private schools, eight attend public schools.

FINALLY, Morgan closes, "Al-

though it seems in vogue at this time to criticize public education, those making the loudest noises are often those who know the least of what they are talking about."

"Vogue" does not enter the equation of improving our schools, nor "scathing remarks."

No matter where Farmington Schools stand today, we must continually strive for better. With 60 percent of property taxes going to the schools, it is imperative for the sake of our children's future in a competitive, global economy that we do not rest, until our schools improve.

Gina Petrak, Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in "Inq. From Our Readers" column.

Submitting a letter to the editor for publication is easy.

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

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