

# Opinion

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## Busing cuts Schools must mend fences

**P**EOPLE ARE super steamed at Farmington school officials these days, and one of the noisiest coming out of their mouths sounds like "REEEECALLLLL!"

That's right, recall. That dreaded R word is popping up in conversations between seemingly rational folks who just a few weeks ago had very few discouraging words to say about their public school system or the people who run it.

The people could be just blowing off steam. Probably they are. Hopefully, but school officials would do well to note the noises.

The trouble came with the start of the 1991-92 school year, — and, as promised by officials, a \$1 million reduction in school bus service.

The cut is part of a package of cuts made in the wake of a millage failure last February and the loss of \$5.8 million in state aid.

As a result of the cuts, secondary students are now clustered along busy main roads waiting for their buses weekday mornings. Many of the buses are late to be in the subdivisions.

Parents upset that their precious young ones have to walk farther and then stand along roadways, exposed to any and all dangers of the road these darkening mornings, are not docile about this.

ABOUT 150 of them crowded the school board members at the last meeting to register their complaints. It was not a gentle scene, not a show of civility would have liked to see on cable TV.

Anger was raised, fingers pointed and tears welled up.

On one hand, the parents know (or should have known) that the cuts were coming. We remember hearing officials say that if the February millage failed, cuts would be made in the levels of school bus service. Their statements were widely reported.

But on the other hand, we have to take the schools to task over the way the busing cuts were introduced. They were just dropped — plopped — at the last minute on parents who have over the years come to expect better from their school system.

Using the benefits of hindsight, we think the

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schools should have prepared the population for the busing cuts early on by asking the public for help in plotting the new routes and stops.

Some sort of a parent committee probably could have accomplished this in plenty of time for the school opening. Communication is a key element in solving many of these problems. Apparently, there wasn't much communication on these busing cuts.

AND THEN THERE IS the lousy attitudes — as perceived by some parents — of certain school employees who either refuse to discuss the problems or simply blow the callers away with smart-ass comments.

Well, "perceived" is the key word here. Public officials should remember that perception is reality to these distraught parents. There are a lot of mumbblings in the district these days, and officials would do well to listen.

For example, there is a perception that the busing changes are punishing the community for not supporting the millage — something school officials strongly deny.

And there is another perception that the changes will make parents so fearful for the safety of their children that they'll gladly approve the next millage hike — with the promise of restored transportation. This is also denied.

Of course, there is the perception that a district whose officials claim financial woes should not be giving an average 5 percent wage increase to its union employees.

You hear a lot of talk about the busing cuts and other problems in the Farmington District. There's usually a degree of truth in the statements. Let's hope school officials, both elected and appointed, can mend some fences in the community before that statement about recall becomes reality.

## Take action Make their sentences equal

**C**ARJACKING.

A word that wasn't in our vocabulary six months ago has become the most talked-about crime in recent memory. City and suburbs alike, drivers are pulling up to traffic lights and looking suspiciously at the people in the car next to them.

It's a hard problem for responsible people. Instinct says fight back; reason dictates a more prudent approach. It's a hard problem because there is no easy, correct solution.

That means, to us, that the solution lies in a combination of actions, starting with something we've advocated all along: greater cooperation between the city of Detroit and our suburbs. Carjacking certainly isn't worrying about which side of Eight Mile they hit.

IF THERE IS to be a task force culled from suburban and city law enforcement departments, then it needs to become active immediately, not only to halt carjackings, but to let residents know that someone is responding to this problem.

Additionally, courts can cooperate with one another and agree on a substantial, regional sentence for convicted carjackers. That way carjackers would find the sentence would be the same, regardless of where the crime took place.

Before laying all the responsibility in the lap of law enforcement, we also would call on the area's large corporations — car insurance companies, for example — to lend a little muscle to this fight. Let's veer off course for a minute.

Do you know why you didn't hear about the death toll on the road this past Labor Day week-

end? It's because the car insurance companies have been so effective in their pitch for safe driving that the death toll now is pretty much the same on holiday weekends as it is on any other weekend.

That's about, and insurance companies have a vested interest in seeing carjacking stop. If they have to pay out too much on too many claims, then redlining will increase, premiums will follow suit and residents will howl more than they already are about mandating a rollback and then capping premium rates.

BACK ON the law enforcement end, anyone in the suburbs who drives the freeways to work has seen police, waiting to nail anyone going over the speed limit. With such a serious problem as carjacking upon us, it would be worthwhile to get those police cars out on the roads, patrolling.

There's also the spinoff effect of all this. In some suburban areas, it's pretty common to see white police officers pulling over and questioning black drivers. Sometimes it seems as though they rarely pull over white drivers. If carjacking persists, everyone is going to get edgier than they already are, which eventually could materialize in the form of escalating incidents of harassment. No one needs that.

So let's get this taken care of and prove two things: that we can eradicate carjacking by making the certainty of punishment so great that no one will want to take the risk; and that when it's important, we can band together and solve a common problem.

## Freshman legislator opens up way to women's right to vote

Harry Burns did it for his mother. Nearly half the adult population of the United States had been denied the right to vote from the time of the country's founding.

The framers of the Constitution had neatly side-stepped the question by leaving voting qualifications to the states. Few states gave women the vote.

The women's rights movement began to take shape at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. By a narrow margin convention delegates passed a resolution favoring women's suffrage.

But the day was far from coming. The 19th Amendment passed the House in 1918 and the Senate in 1919. Carrie Chapman Catt led the fight for state ratification.

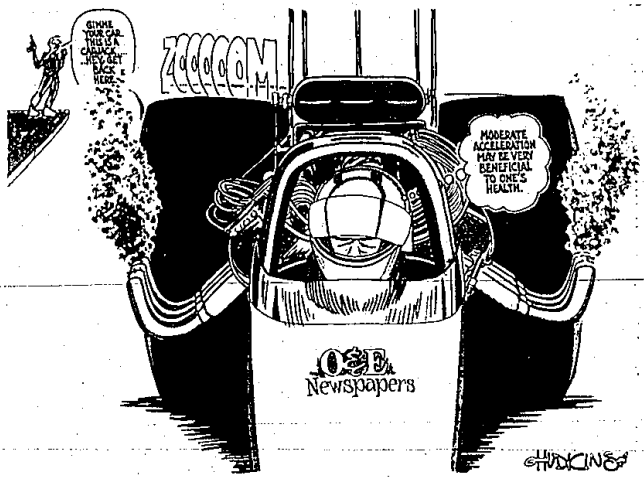
The final showdown focused on Tennessee and a 24-year-old freshman legislator, Harry Burns voted for the amendment because his

mother asked him to "be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt." He also helped give the franchise to 26,000,000 Americans when ratification was concluded on Aug. 26, 1920.

This is another in a continuing series marking the anniversary of the Bill of Rights.



200th  
ANNIVERSARY  
Bill of Rights



## Fear of change deters year-round school idea

A RITUAL in our house is taking a picture of my son, Nathan, as he boards the first bus of the new school year. Nathan, 9, will be a fourth grader for the 180 days that Michigan children attend school.

Nathan's counterparts in Scotland attend school 200 days a year, in Israel 215, South Korea 220, in Japan 243 — two full months longer than American kids.

It isn't surprising that children who go to school longer than Americans learn more. Most tests comparing school achievement show our kids lagging behind those of our international economic competitors.

WHY NOT increase the number of days of school from Michigan's currently mandated 180 days?

Habit, for one reason. Schools resist change.

Cost, for another. According to Beverly Wolkow, executive director of the Michigan Education Association, our biggest teachers union, the average teacher in Michigan makes around \$38,000 per year — \$210 a day. Paying 80,000 teachers for five extra days would cost \$84 million.

Admittedly, there's a big argument about extra pay for those extra days. Some say teachers are paid an annual salary, working extra days is just part of the job. Wolkow says that's not fair.

Let's compromise: \$100 a day for five more days, or \$40 million — not peanuts.

NOT UNTIL you realize that total local and state spending for Michigan K-12 schools is nearly \$6.5 billion a year. So \$40 million is only a 0.6 percent increase in the total. There are other costs: bus drivers, custodians, administrators, utilities, materials, wear and tear on the buildings.

Who's to say five more days of school — a 2.7 percent increase in the total school year — aren't worth a 1-percent increase in spending?

Political reality, that's who. Gov. John Engler asked for \$150,000 for six pilot districts to bump school days from 180 to 200. There's bipartisan legislative support for much the same thing.

But with the state facing a \$300 million revenue shortfall and legislators from both parties preoccupied with survival after reappointment, don't hold your breath waiting for a 200-day school year.

HUGH JARVIS, president of the Michigan Federation of Teachers (the smaller union), is pushing consideration of a year-round school calendar.

"Research has shown conclusively that students, especially in lower grades, lose much of what was learned during the school year over the traditional two-and-a-half months summer vacation," Jarvis said.

A brief, pre-bus preview of the multiplication tables with my son validates Jarvis' point.



Philip  
Power

A few districts are trying a year-round calendar — 45 days of class, 15 days vacation — repeated through the year. Huron Valley School District, around Millford in western Oakland County, was on such a plan when superintendent James Doyle arrived eight years ago.

"People like it," said Doyle of the optional year-round program. He estimated only 5 percent of district children enroll — "mostly because of tradition... families like taking the summer off."

Any learning improvements? "Statistically, you can't find much evidence in test scores, but you get the impression that they retain more," he said.

Added costs? "No big ones, although you'd probably have to air-condition all the buildings." A good idea hangs in the air, one that doesn't cost much and just maybe would help kids learn. On the other side are tradition, inertia, fear of change.

When will we ever learn? Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

## from our readers

### He should come before the council

To the editor:

In response to a recent article that appeared in The Farmington Observer, I can assure Pat Anderson that the Farmington Hills City Council will do what is legally required in relation to the recycling fee.

I wish Anderson had come before us, as did other citizens, during the weeks and months when the issue was discussed before city council and while the recycling ordinance was being introduced and adopted.

Residents are always welcome to make their views heard on any issue that comes before council or on any topic not on the agenda during the Public Questions and Comments period.

When the question of adding the charge to the tax rolls in place of the fee was brought before council, we were assured by our attorney that the fee was legal and in conformity with directives from the state and federal governments requiring the city to sharply reduce the amount of waste being taken to landfills.

In adopting the fee we felt that it was a fairer way of handling the extra charge for curbside recycling since we are covering single family units only at the present time. We also made it clear that we would revisit the issue of placing the fee on the tax rolls at the point when condominiums and other multiples were brought under the program.

young people on the line.

The move shows an ethical bankruptcy that goes deeper than any budget deficit and a callous disregard for the safety of children.

At the Sept. 3 board of education meeting, the administration tried to justify putting young people in the path of rush hour traffic by pointing to the failure of last year's millage vote.

The superintendent said "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Those words hold little comfort for parents who face an increased risk of losing a child.

The administration says some changes in the new routes have been made, and others may follow on an individual basis. By admitting certain stops are not safe, the administration has admitted that safety was not adequately studied when the new system was established. If it had been, why would any changes be necessary?

It is not the time to change one stop here and another there. It is time to abandon this new transportation policy in total, before the district is called on to explain to a grieving parent exactly why there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Jerry Plasecki  
Farmington Hills

### Bus routes show 'ethical bankruptcy'

To the editor:

"Warning: Attending Farmington Hills Schools could be hazardous to your children's health." This should have been mailed to every parent in the district, along with the new bus schedules.

The decision to have middle schoolers stand on dark, slippery main roads this winter and elementary school children walk long distances to bus stops, was unconscionable and puts the very lives of our

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