

POINTS OF VIEW

The Farmington school millage is a renewal

The Farmington Observer editorial of Jan. 7 entitled "Let's Talk — Comments on millage," contained statements about the Feb. 2, 1993, millage renewal which were inaccurate and misleading.

The editorial repeated a quote from a person described as a "local education watchdog and unsuccessful school board candidate" which alleged that the consolidated millage renewal proposition would in reality be a millage increase and that it would "supersede the effects of the Headlee Amendment three years in a row."

Although the editorial asserted that "This is the kind of question that has to be answered — and soon," the newspaper has never contacted anyone at this school district for comment or response to those claims.

Yet you have printed them twice, the second time under theegis of your ed-

GUEST COLUMN

itorial banner. The suggestion that these claims are accurate and important enough to receive editorial emphasis has angered many people in the community and the school district.

Even Superintendent Mike Flanagan, who never voices objections to particular editorials, immediately telephoned the newspaper to express his astonishment that you gave those allegations editorial recognition.

To set the record straight, this ballot proposition is not a millage increase. It is a continuation of the school district's current millage rate, which has been reduced by the constitutional Headlee millage reduction formula over the last several years.

Secondly, this millage renewal will not somehow magically "Supersede" the Michigan Constitution. Any future millage rate reductions required by the Headlee Amendment will take place regardless of whether the millage rate renewals are consolidated or take place in three annual renewals.

Consolidating the three consecutive millages saves the time, effort and costs involved in asking the voters to take part in three annual millage elections.

The one consolidated renewal will provide exactly the same amount of funding as would be provided from three consecutive annual millage renewals.

The editorial also stated that asking voters to renew a consolidated millage package could confuse some voters.

For your information, during all of the board meetings and subsequent discussions with citizens, parents and staff prior to your editorial, there was little or no confusion about consolidating three annual renewals into one renewal.

Since your editorial, however, I have responded to a host of questions about the district's implied attempts to sneak through a millage increase and elude the Headlee amendment. Your editorial, not the consolidated millage, has caused confusion among your readers.

It is the newspaper's responsibility to check out the accuracy of statements which appear in its editorials. At a minimum, that includes contacting all appropriate sources to gather facts and

other points of view.

If the Farmington Observer has not gained an understanding of the facts and formed an opinion about them, it should not lend the newspaper's editorial profile and implied agreement to such statements by printing them without comment on the opinion page.

Unlike straight news stories, the contents of the editorial page are expected to convey the newspaper's opinion about issues. In this case, I believe you did not intend to imply that the Farmington Observer agrees with the quoted statements.

If that is the case, it should be clarified in a future editorial — and soon.

Bruce Barrett,
assistant superintendent for
finance and planning,
Farmington Public Schools

Life in fast lane teaches wrong lesson to kids

Don't honk at the school bus drivers.

"Huh?"
"The principal made an announcement on the PA system today. She said to tell our parents not to honk at the school bus drivers."

"What prompted that?"
"Somebody was honking at a bus driver this morning."

The Fourth Grader didn't know any more details, but I figured this was worth looking into.

The scene, as described by the principal at the school, was right out of the Theater of the Absurd.

A woman, presumably a mother, had dropped her child off at the back of the school near the portable classrooms. When she tried to leave the area, she found her way temporarily blocked by a school bus unloading children.

Unwilling to wait for three or four minutes when the bus would have been

on its way, she began honking the horn.

When the bus didn't move, she got out of her car and began yelling at the driver to move the bus.

I don't know how long she yelled and honked, but the spectacle she created led to the "Don't honk" announcement.

The principal acknowledged that the bus shouldn't have completely blocked the traffic lane, but the driver was a substitute and made a mistake. I drop the Fourth Grader off every morning in the same area where the irate mother got blocked in. I've been blocked a couple of times, too. It happens. But it's not worth honking about.

While the honking incident may not be of cosmic significance, it illustrates something that I first noticed a few years ago when The Fourth Grader was in catechism classes: Church (and school) parking lots are a microcosm of society.



JACK GLADDEN

The way drivers behave in these lots tells you a lot more about their "values" (family or otherwise) than all the sermons and speeches in the world.

When I would take The (then) First Grader to catechism, I'd park in a parking place, walk her inside to the classroom and make sure the teacher was there. When I came to pick her up an hour or so later, I'd repeat the performance.

Not so with those people who would stop in the traffic lane, let kids out to walk between moving cars to reach the building. After the classes the lot would be teeming with cars double parked, blocking other cars in, and kids darting in and out of traffic to reach their waiting parents.

One of the nuns who attempted to be a traffic cop and stop the double-parking, horn-honking, dangerous driving activities gave up after getting snarled at and yelled at by parents who were furious that she wanted them to park in a parking place and escort their children in and out of the building instead of creating hazardous conditions on the lot.

I hoped the kids learned enough in catechism to counteract what they learned from parents like that. But I doubt it.

The elementary school lots are just as bad. Granted, most of the lots were

not designed to handle the amount of traffic that flows through them, but that doesn't excuse the behavior of the adult drivers. They speed, they double park, they park in the fire lanes beside the "No Parking" signs.

They drop their kids off in the traffic lane rather than wait for a spot to open up along the curb.

It's a problem that frustrates the principals as much as it did the nun at catechism class.

The parking lot issue may not seem as significant as sex education controversies, developmental learning disputes and all the other issues newspaper people write about. But it should be.

Kids learn a lot more from their parents' actions than they do in any classroom. And it's pretty pathetic when the kids have to bring home the message: "Don't honk at the school bus drivers."

LETTERS

A good group

Cathleen M. Webb, guest columnist and Farmington Board of Education member, asks in her column (Dec. 17) what the group Citizens for Quality Schools has done to justify their name.

I know next to nothing about the by-laws and mission of this organization, but what I do know is that this organization continues to place the Farmington School Board under the microscope.

Most citizens do not attend school board meetings and have very limited knowledge of our schools. However, some individuals do read the newspaper and may even be moved to vote after reading articles that appear only because this very group is doing its homework.

I also understand why the Farmington School Board appears to always be agitated by Citizens for Quality Schools.

Simply, Citizens for Quality Schools believe 67 percent of our tax dollars is very adequate funding to support an excellent school system.

On the other hand, the Farmington Board of Education, believes 67 percent of our tax dollars is just not enough. Because of this, voters are asked over and over again to vote themselves a tax increase.

Maybe, just maybe, if print coverage is nil, voters would forget to vote, and consequently that long awaited-millage increase would pass.

I publicly and enthusiastically thank Robert Ranney, president of Citizens for Quality Schools, for his dedication and commitment in hopes of making Farmington Schools better schools.

And I ask Cathleen Webb to join me in encouraging more parents to join Citizens for Quality Schools and by doing so help make Farmington Schools the best schools in the country.

Gina Petrak, Farmington Hills

Serve the public

Your editorial, "Let's Talk," applies to the Farmington Observer as well.

This is a straightforward renewal, a 12.0834 mill renewal of 14.0 mills expiring. The difference between the two numbers is the effect of the Headlee Amendment.

Farmington Public Schools is simply being upfront and honest. The Headlee Amendment only allows 12.0834 of the 14.0 mills to be levied. Therefore that is all that the community is being asked to renew.

There is opposition, an opposition that uses the knowledge that the negative does not require substantiation. The negative thrives on

the creation of doubt, mistrust, misrepresentation, and confusion. Once that is in place, then proponents can talk until they are blue in the face, mistrust and doubt still lingers.

The Observer has a role to play. An independent source of information is the best weapon against a campaign of subterfuge. Lay out the numbers.

Explain the Headlee Amendment and how it is independent of the timing of the renewals. Identify that the 12.0834 mills represents the current Headlee Amendment proportion of the 14.0 mills that is expiring.

I expect the Observer to be interested in protecting the community from misinformation.

Dave York, Farmington Hills

Tax questions

I believe your paper could perform a valuable civic service by reporting the real facts concerning the upcoming school tax millage renewal.

In the article on school taxes in your Dec. 31 paper, there appears to be a difference of opinion as to whether it is a renewal or a tax increase.

As a voter who is interested in the facts, I would appreciate answers to the following questions on the school tax issue:

■ Will we be voting on three separate millage proposals or one combined proposal? If only one, why, since each of the three was previously voted on separately? Why vote on a renewal for 1994 now versus when it is due to expire?

■ What was the purpose/need for each of the three millages previously passed? Why do they need to be renewed given the increase in the tax base in our community? It would be helpful to know the amount and percent increase in tax base and taxes collected versus the amount and percent increase in students during the duration of each of the millages.

■ What has been the percent increase in average property tax appraisals versus the percent increase in cost of living for the same period for each of the three millages?

■ Why is the vote scheduled for early February when many of our citizens are out of the area versus in November during a general election?

■ If passed, will the mills due to expire in '93 and '94 continue to be collected in addition to the renewed mills or will they be cancelled?

There are probably many other issues which I have overlooked which I trust your investigative reporters will surface to help voters make an informed decision.

Blair Algie, Farmington Hills

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