

POINTS OF VIEW

Stand up to 'marauding' state legislators

The legislators are coming! The legislators are coming! Once again it is time for a call to arms.

Local financing and local control of public education has been swept away by the state. How will financing and control be redefined? Will you stand up and be counted? Or will you stand on the side of the road and let the legislators maraud through our district? I ask that you consider what can be expected from our state legislators and how you perceive Farmington Public Schools. If you decide that Farmington Public Schools has a good program and that you want to retain your ability to have an impact on it, then now is the time to join forces and face the legislators.

We will write, visit, or fax our local legislators and all of the legislators on the school finance committees and education committees. And don't forget our governor.

Can we expect equality and fairness for Farmington? The last four years of Robin Hood and recapture suggest not. The just passed 1993/94 school aid bill is a continuation of penalizing districts like Farmington.

Because our community has made a democratic choice to support their children's education, the state has chosen

to selectively renege on their financial commitments and obligations. Cripple the few, to throw pennies at the many. Yet another band-aid.

A band-aid approach has been repeated year in and year out while the state avoids legislating and generates ballot issues instead. I ask that you examine the role of the state in public education. What do you think it should be? And what are the clear and simple consequences of your belief on the financing and control of public education?

The state is responsible to its citizens to ensure that they all receive the opportunity to become educated to the minimum level. That responsibility translates directly to funding. A state responsibility of a minimum standard requires state funding to achieve that minimum standard.

This has had two direct consequences. The funding must come from a state levy and the funds must be distributed to all children in the state.

Likewise, a responsibility for the minimum standard directly translates to the delineation of control. The state should only exercise enough control to ensure attainment of the minimum standard. Beyond this point, education objectives, educational requirements, financing and control should be left to

QUESTY COLUMNIST



DAVID YORK

local districts.

State should be ally

The state should not interfere with a local district's democratically determined choices on how to educate children beyond the state's minimum standard. Just the opposite, the state should be an ally in the protection of the local district's democratic processes.

I view the state's role to be defined by and limited to the setting of a minimum standard, the financing of an equal opportunity to achieve that standard for every student in the state, prescribing the evaluation of the attainment of the minimum standard, exercising the minimum control required to ensure attainment of that standard,

and protecting local districts' democratic processes.

I also ask you to evaluate Farmington Public Schools and your desire to have both a voice and an impact on its operation. Does Farmington have a good program?

In Farmington, I have found a belief and commitment that every child can learn. In Farmington, I have found a school system on a steady march, moving to the type of school system where every child can learn.

There is a lot of work involved. New relationships need to be developed and nurtured between teachers themselves, teachers and students, teachers and administrators, teachers and parents, central administration and individual schools, and administration, the associations, and the community.

Focus on students

In Farmington, I have found a consistent and deep-rooted guiding focus — the children. Farmington Public Schools has identified the knowledge and skills to be developed in our students.

I believe in those skills because the marketplace is using those skills today to screen job applicants and because only with those skills will we have citizens who are critical thinkers, prob-

lem-solvers and self-reliant individuals.

Research and experience identify the teaching practices required to develop those skills in our students. Farmington Public Schools is moving toward the day when those teaching practices will be found in every classroom in the district.

Farmington Public Schools is moving toward the day when we evaluate every classroom based on how research and experience has identified what those classrooms should look like. When I read or listen to the rations given to take drastic action with public schools, I do not read or hear a description of the Farmington Public School system. I do not read or hear a description of many of our classrooms across the district.

Where drastic action is called for, by all means take it. But where support and adjustment is needed, drastic action is usually counterproductive and results in major setbacks.

The state has wiped the slate clean. Stop, think, study, and then decide what you think is best.

Then, let our legislators know what you think. Your voices need to be heard.

David York, a Farmington Hills resident, was elected to the Farmington Board of Education last June.

Brochures show continuing ed is alive and well

Everything's up to date at the local community colleges — Oakland and Schoolcraft. You can tell from the catalogs from OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus and Schoolcraft's two campuses for their "continuing education" classes. They don't call it "adult ed" any more. Some courses are for kids. Moreover, many older adults take regular credit courses to earn associate degrees. Half the graduating students at our community colleges have grey temples and bifocals.

When he was chancellor at OCC, Steve Nicholson used to say that community colleges enroll more people with bachelor's degrees than graduate schools.

Looking at the brochures, you can see why. OCC's Womencenter has a series

of courses that is realistic if depressing: legal clinic, divorce support group, incest survivor support group, math anxiety for women, "mended and moving on," "transitions" and domestic violence.

There's a page of social and religious consciousness activities: work in a soup kitchen, nonviolent conflict resolution, global awareness lectures, even retreats conducted by Catholic priests.

A series of concerts features artists from Spain, France, Brazil, Germany and Israel. That would be eye-opening. In the U.S., our classical music tastes are oriented toward northern Europe, and we neglect a lot of superb Latin American music.

There are long lists of courses in the real estate and insurance fields; personal finance courses; and the inevitable computer courses on systems, word processors, spread sheets, graphics and



TIM RICHARD

publishing.

Besides the traditional arts and crafts courses, OCC has one on "marketing your arts & crafts."

There are a couple of pages of gourmet dinner offerings and culinary arts courses that seem to add inches to your waistline just reading about them, fol-

lowed by two more pages of fitness and recreation classes.

Traveling? Study Italian and Russian.

Schoolcraft, under President Dick McDowell, is keenly aware of how many people are getting out of the corporate rat race and into their own businesses. Four new courses are: employment law, creating employee handbooks, discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment in the workplace and the Family Leave and Medical Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

That's followed by a column on starting a business, what it takes to "make it big," franchising, finding capital and (get this) "taking your business global."

Schoolcraft's folks must have been reading our Barry Franklin's fitness

columns. The culinary basics has new offerings on European bread making and pasta cooking along with the reliable courses in wild game preparation, vegetarian cuisines and "chocolate, chocolate, chocolate." I don't dare even look at the gourmet dinners.

Schoolcraft's most famous personage may well be Don Morelock, who teaches piano teachers. The music program has a youth piano project, guitar, opera and community choir courses.

We don't cover it much in a community newspaper, but there's a big harness racing industry out here, so Schoolcraft has 11 appropriate courses, including hoof care.

Your brochures should have arrived during August in the mail. If you lost it, call OCC's continuing ed office at 471-7520 and Schoolcraft's at 462-4400. You'll want to look at both.

Summer's end sheds light on mistrust of lawyers

Labor Day in Michigan always gives me a slightly and feeling, a regretful look backward at summer's coming to an end.

The corn may be ripe, the tomatoes luscious. But the rich gold light we get at this time of year always comes to me tinged with the hollow sound of the cicadas.

And for those who shut down their cabins up North over the weekend, the last slap of the screen door closes out another summer season.

I spent some time this summer at our cabin in the Upper Peninsula, five miles from the nearest phone. Returning to the hurly-burly of the real world reassured me that life hadn't changed that much while I was out of touch.

The politicians still are fusing and fuming about taxes and school quality. The UAW and the auto industry still are negotiating. The Tigers still are not in contention.

And thanks to Dick Agnina's auto accident in Florida, I know trial lawyers still infest the land.

Dick is president and CEO of the company that owns this newspaper. A perverse fellow, he took part of his vacation this year in Florida, where an elderly gentleman swerved his car across the median and slammed into the front end of Dick's.

Dick and Diane, his wife, are a bit bruised but OK. Upon their return to Michigan, they started getting a lot of mail from the Florida ambulance-chasers. Dick shared some with me.

One outstanding example was a slick, four-color brochure featuring a smiling lawyer standing before what looks like a law library.

The accompanying letter urged Dick to retain the lawyer: "My job as YOUR Accident Attorney is to quickly obtain compensation for such expenses as ambulance bills, hospital bills, doctor bills, lost wages, rental car expenses, and property damage. . . . Except for costs, I receive



PHILIP POWER

no attorneys fees unless YOU RECOVER DAMAGES!"

Another letter ended in boldface type: "Protect your rights, speak to no one but an attorney. Do not hesitate to call!"

Evidently, the good ol' boys in Florida have quite a system worked out. A publication called the Florida Reporter scans newspapers and other public records and prints the names and addresses of people who have had accidents. Then the ambulance chasers go to work.

(For the record, the correct term for the activity of encouraging people to sue others is "turban." For most lawyers, it has a fairly unethical ring to it, evidently unheard in parts of the Florida bar.)

Persistent readers of this column will recall my general views about lawyers in general and the plaintiff's bar in particular. I'm glad to see the problem is, if anything, worse in Florida than it is here in Michigan.

Let the record also show that Dick and Diane survived a head-on collision with only minor scrapes and bruises, thanks to seat belts and an air bag.

Buckle 'em up! Hope you had a safe holiday. It's good to be back.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His voice mail telephone number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

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