

That's hardball!

Dolan shouldn't be surprised

They pitched her high and inside, and she doesn't like it one bit. But, gosh, state Rep. Jan Dolan, that's how they play hardball in the school finance league.

Dolan, who represents the Farmington area, heard the ball go whining past her ear last Friday as she opened her mailbox and found the slick, colorful brochure that put down the so-called "Engler plan" to finance public schools without property taxes.

Then Dolan heard something else: her telephone ringing and ringing. Seems the brochure included her name and her home and Lansing phone numbers in big black letters.

Bristling with indignation, Dolan was in the newspaper office late Friday afternoon with the brochure and a "How-dare-they!" speech.

She produced a response that leads our letters column on this page. An article about the brochure appears somewhere in this edition.

The powerful Michigan Education Association, miffed at having the trusty property tax removed as the method of paying its teachers, is responsible for the brochures, claim Dolan and other lawmakers similarly targeted. We don't doubt that for a minute.

Dolan and others are in the MEA's gunsights because they were the ones who helped scuttle that golden goose of a property tax.

Back in July, you'll remember, state lawmakers — including Dolan — went on what one local school official called a "feeding frenzy" and voted to eliminate the local property tax as the chief means of operating the public schools.

How would that \$5.6 billion in local revenue be replaced? Oh, the good legislators couldn't (or wouldn't) say. It's been a hotly-debated topic ever since.

Dolan and others are in the MEA's gun sights because they were the ones who helped scuttle that golden goose of a property tax.

Now, we understand if Dolan is a bit uncomfortable these days. The popular lawmaker is, or always has been, safe at home. She's well-known and liked in her district, which includes just Farmington and Farmington Hills. She has had few detractors. If there's a more secure House member in Michigan, please point him/her out.

She does not want to become known as that woman who helped screw up the Farmington Public Schools. She's been attempting to explain herself at school meetings and elsewhere ever since July.

We think that if Dolan isn't so safe at home, if she had some competition on the local Republican scene, if she knew opponents were hanging on her every political move, then maybe she would consider her actions in Lansing a little more carefully.

Perhaps she wouldn't be so quick to join the thundering herd that trampled school finances into such a confusing mess last July.

Anyway, those were our thoughts last Friday as we listened to Jan Dolan read 'em and weep. We're sorry but, hey, she messed with the source of Michigan teachers' wealth. She should not be surprised when Michigan teachers collectively mess back. That's hardball in the school finance league. You're up, Jan.

Keep clear of charter schools

When he was running for governor, John Engler never said a word about "charter schools," the shaky educational gimmick that is in so much trouble in the Legislature.

Gov. Engler prides himself on "Promises Made, Promises Kept." He never promised charter schools. His conscience would be clear if he backed away from the idea. And back away he should.

A charter school is a "school without boundaries," in the administration's words. A group of teachers, parents, a business or any other entity could organize a non-profit corporation and be granted a charter by the school district or state. No church official can be involved. It would be free of "bureaucratic red tape." Translation: no Teacher Tenure Act and a union-free environment.

The demand for charter schools never came from teachers and parents. It was invented by an ideological think tank called McKinac Center and a related group called Teach Michigan.

Their original idea was a voucher system — the state would give each pupil a check, and the pupil would enroll at any public, private, parochial or fly by night academy.

But vouchers are explicitly unconstitutional. State voters decided that emphatically in 1970. Voters emphasized the point by rejecting a constitutional amendment to allow "parochial."

In the charter debate, we smell a hidden agenda — and not well hidden, at that. "Charter schools" are plainly and simply a stalking horse for vouchers and parochial. If the Legislature adopts charter schools, the next step will be a constitutional convention — the issue is on the 1994 ballot — to remove the prohibitions

against public taxes for private schools.

Perhaps the real reason behind the grab for public funds is plummeting non-public enrollments: from a peak of 361,000 in 1965-66 to 175,000 in 1990-91, a decline of 51.5 percent. In roughly the same period, public school enrollments declined 30 percent.

The non-public's share of the market slipped from a recent high of 11.5 percent in 1983-85 to barely 10 percent currently.

Well, hire good teachers, retrain them as needed, give them good equipment and we'll have good schools. Reinforce good schools with supportive parents who value education, and we'll have better schools and competent graduates.

Michigan, with so many tiny school districts, would be particularly vulnerable to bad charter schools.

If Engler fails to foresee the sinister results of charter schools, then he should consider political reality. The charter school idea is in big trouble in the Legislature:

■ Senate Republicans barely scraped together enough votes to pass it. Senate Democrats will hold all tax bills hostage until the charter schools idea is toned down or junked.

■ The bipartisan leaders of the House Education Committee already have scrapped charter schools in favor of a much modified system of academies that would offer the state's core curriculum and "emphasize skills rather than rote learning."

Candidate Engler never promised the voters charter schools. He would be wise to forget about delivering such a suspicious gimmick, if he is truly interested in reinventing schools.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Brochure misleads

A misleading brochure circulated by the Michigan Education Association is a tactic that demeans the genuine school reform progress being achieved.

The fliers rely on inaccuracies and deceptive statements to attack the proposed school reform initiative. The brochures are being mailed to districts statewide by the MEA, Lansing's largest and most powerful lobbying group; Michigan Federation of Teachers and the Michigan Parent Teacher Association.

None of these organizations' names appear in the fliers, though. They instead are mailed under the guise of a group called A Partnership for the Future.

My criticism of these special interests should not be construed as "teacher-bashing," but union leaders obviously are advancing their own agendas rather than sharing memberships' concerns for our children. The half-truths are a great disservice to the earnest school reform efforts under way at the Capitol. Ensuring equity and quality in our schools requires a constructive partnership between parents, educators, job providers and public servants.

The brochure claims that the schools of choice proposal prevents parents from working with local teachers, and from having a say in who attends neighborhood schools.

That statement is simply wrong. School choice is specifically designed to give parents greater input in their children's education. Parents will have the option of keeping children in their own school districts. Local students also would get first priority when enrolling in neighborhood schools. Any additional openings would then be made available to students from outside the district.

Other distortions include assertions that unqualified individuals could teach children and that the governor's plan won't reform schools.

I'm not on board with every aspect of the governor's plan, but I believe it should be debated on its true merits, not misinformation. Perhaps the questionable content of this literature explains why the lobbyists refused to list their organizations on it.

Michigan children will be much better off if the interest groups channel their energy into problem-solving rather than obstructionism. Their actions to date have been counterproductive to the open and honest discussions that we need.

I am pleased with the positive results being made in Lansing, and encourage the special interests to stop pushing their own agendas at the expense of the truth — and our children.

State Rep. Jan Dolan, Farmington Hills

it, though, without my wonderful group of supporters.

They helped with all aspects of the campaign, so I was able to concentrate on my door-to-door, which was the most important part of my campaign.

I received a lot of support and encouragement from my husband Ron and my sons Nick, Kevin, Joe and Alex. They held down the fort at home while I was out talking to residents.

My campaign manager, Brenda Kandt, was invaluable to me. She kept everything organized and running smoothly. Aldo Vagozzi also gave me a tremendous boost, and so did my endorsement from the Farmington Observer.

When you are a candidate, you are on an emotional seesaw. Everyone on my committee helped me with words of encouragement, and kept pushing me to keep going. I couldn't have accomplished what I did without them.

My special thanks go to you, the voters of Farmington Hills. Without you, I wouldn't have been the top vote-getter on Nov. 2, 1993.

Cheryl Oliverio, Farmington Hills council member

Thanks for coming

On behalf of the administration and staff at Botsford General Hospital, I would like to take the opportunity to extend a sincere thank you to reporter Bill Coutant for joining us at our annual leadership forum on Oct. 14.

With health care issues commanding the political and national spotlight, we hope this forum provided some new insight and perspective into some of these issues.

Botsford General Hospital intends to hold the annual forum to provide a setting for addressing topics of concern and interest within the health-care industry and the community. We are pleased you could be among those leaders who attended.

I would also like to thank the Farmington Observer for its continued attention to all Botsford General Hospital activities. We are grateful for your support of our efforts.

Margo Gorechow, administrator, Hospital & Community Relations, Botsford General Hospital

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

How should the authorities handle Jack Kevorkian and his right-to-die campaign?



"It's difficult to make an assessment because you're hearing two different stories about him." Carolee Hund, Farmington



"I think he should be prosecuted. What's he's doing is not morally or ethically right. I believe in death with dignity, but not the way he does it." Laura Opperman, Novi



"There's a place for suicide. . . maybe it should be taken to the courts." Ted Greenlee, Farmington Hills



"I think we should all have the right to decide what happens to our own bodies." Mary Milfaud, Dearborn Heights

Thanks so much

Well, the election is over and there wasn't anyone in the city more surprised than I was at the outcome. I was absolutely thrilled. I couldn't have done

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