

A look back

Schools, rights dominate year

Following tradition, we're recapping our 1993 regional editorial positions, absorbing space dealing with our community that usually appears at the top of this column. Local editors recap their stands in either the issue before this one or in early January.

In our corner of Michigan, it was a year that saw school reform, individual rights — particularly assisted suicide — and our suburbs' relationship with Detroit dominate our news pages, editorials and columns.

Those issues also pervaded the letters and columns written by your neighbors who contributed to our editorial and Points of View pages.

School reform

Financial:

We have been firm on reinstating the property tax as one way to fund schools. In March we opined that the property tax always will be with us and is a good reflection of the cost of living. If the property tax were cut, the money would have to be made up elsewhere.

The state House, Senate and even Gov. John Engler have come around to our way of thinking. The recent agreement on schools would reimpose some school property taxes eliminated last summer — plus having voters choose between raising the personal income tax or the sales tax.

Educational:

We opposed charter schools, for fear that they were only a euphemism for funding private and religious schools. However, we recently endorsed the House "academy" plan, which allows only public schools and state and community colleges to create charter schools. We'll need to revisit the newly finalized version, which would allow private groups or other public agencies to open charter schools with the sanction of one of the three types of public schools.

Another element of school reform that we champion, but that remains unaddressed, is consolidation of districts. There are too many — 562. Some are small — Clarenceville has just 1,700 students. That's less than some of our high schools. Financially and educationally, these districts are too small to deliver excellence. How inappropriate to divide communities such as Redford Township into three school districts and West Bloomfield into seven.

Other areas of school reform that we endorsed include the Head Start program for every child who needs it; using schools after hours as community centers; and moving teachers away from the chalk-and-talk routine toward group problem-solving.

Individual rights

Assisted suicide:

No matter what you think of Dr. Jack Kevorkian and his two local attorneys, Geoffrey Fieger and Michael Schwartz, the issue of how to treat the terminally ill should be handled the way it has been for years — taking people off life support according to their previous instructions or by mutual consent of doctor and family and/or by utilizing hospice services, which offers palliative care to patients who are terminally ill.

The circumstances around assisted suicide aren't the same as for suicide. We can't know if a person is freely giving up the right to stay



alive. Those with serious diseases or conditions could be encouraged to die quietly because it is cheaper than paying health costs. And elderly patients may opt for assisted suicide solely to make sure they aren't burdens on their children.

It takes an extraordinary effort to commit suicide. It takes less of an effort if someone helps one do it. Those who are in a weak condition, or who are depressed, may not do what they want but instead succumb — literally and figuratively — to external pressures.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never ruled on the right to die. Until that happens, Dr. Jack Kevorkian must desist from assisting in suicides.

Abortion rights:
To no avail, we opposed both informed consent and the 24-hour waiting period before an abortion can be performed. At some point, we hope that a more informed Legislature will do its duty and overturn the law passed this summer, which is demeaning to women in premise and damaging to women as applied.

We suggest that instead of doctors showing these women pictures of the fetus in several growth stages, they should be shown pictures of families living in abject poverty, and of the deformities that can develop in a fetus subjected to nine months of drug or alcohol abuse.

The state has no business influencing what should be the most personal of moral decisions in such a heavy-handed, one-sided way.

Detroit/suburban relationship

Eight Mile plan:

We hit hard on the city of Livonia, the state's eighth-largest city, for its failure to pay its share (\$7,000) in funding the Eight Mile Boulevard Association.

That association is a collection of 12 communities working with the Michigan Department of Transportation and Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties to improve the Eight Mile business district.

Eight Mile is not just a road. It is the boundary, symbolically and in reality, of Detroit and many of its suburbs. In failing to meet its financial commitment, Livonia is sending a detrimental message.

New mayor:

Detroit mayor-elect Dennis Archer spoke in our suburbs — to groups in Birmingham, Farmington Hills and Canton Township. He has met with our county executives, L. Brooks Patterson and Ed McNamara, as well as Gov. Engler and President Bill Clinton.

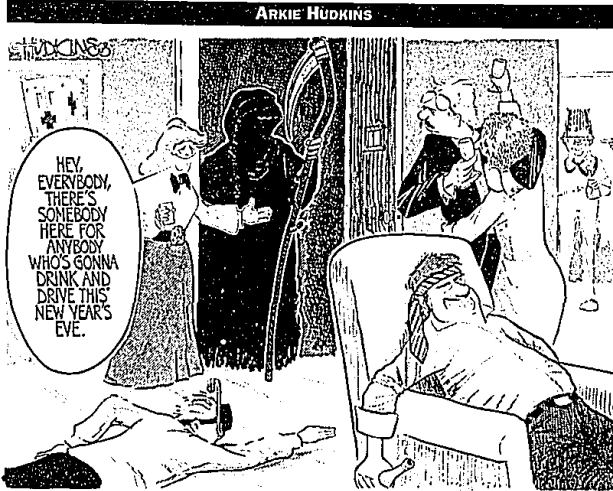
It's clear Archer is doing his part to build bridges between our communities as well as to promote the area statewide and nationally.

And so in congratulating him on his victory, we called on our community leaders to pledge their cooperation.

We called on McNamara and Patterson to cooperate on the regional issues of transit and water.

And, lastly, we called on all of us to work to trample the racism that has kept good people on opposite sides of Eight Mile.

If these are carried out, 1994 should be a very good year in our corner of metro Detroit.



LETTERS

Hills Post Office delivers

R Mr. Hogan, manager, Farmington Hills Post Office:
During the very busy Christmas holiday rush, it was necessary for me to run into the Farmington Hills Post Office several times this week.

I was so disappointed when I went in and saw a very long line waiting for the next window to open up.

But, before I even stood in line a very nice young man came up to me and said if I only wanted stamps, I could go to a special window at the opposite end. He said because the line was so long this morning, he thought it might help if he had one window specifically for stamps only.

I certainly appreciated that, and I commend him for planning ahead. The next time I stopped in I was impressed at how he was handling the very long line of people with packages, etc. He was so helpful and with a smile on his face he was directing people to the next available window and the line was moving fast.

I have never seen the post office run in such a organized fashion and I would like to compliment Julie Hogan, manager.

Thank you for such excellent service during such a busy time of the year.

Sue Arabian, Farmington Hills

Kevorkian a 'quack'

A If the past hullabaloo during the past days and now bringing to Court of Appeals is a great way to make news for the media.

Anyone during past years who wishes to commit suicide has always been able and many have done so by taking poison, using a gun, rope and so on. I remember a 14-year-old boy who did so years ago.

Men does not declare morality. Court of Appeals, State Supreme Court or anyone else cannot declare right or wrong morally. There is something about man or in man that suggests to him, he can be God.

Why does man need a "Quack" doctor or anyone else to motivate, encourage and suggest to someone or oversee for another to commit suicide (kill himself)?

Mr. Quack doctor (Kevorkian) who is for death instead of life should in my opinion be told to go to the barnyards and "Quack" with the geese instead of to people.

Leslie Swanson, Farmington

Program may close

From all of us at Our House, rehabilitation program, thank you for your terrific article about our services and members — "Here's a place that mentally ill can call home" (The Observer & Eccentric, Monday, Dec. 13). Your article captured the excitement and enthusiasm of our clubhouse members — people with mental illness — in their successful efforts to live, work real jobs and enjoy the support

which they provide each other at Our House. After one full year of operation, we are making a real impact on the lives of people with mental illness in our community.

Unfortunately, Our House is in real danger of closing its doors early next year if operational funding from the Oakland County Community Mental Health Board is not forthcoming. While we have survived on the generosity of several small foundations, Michigan Rehabilitation Services and the Oakland County Alliance for the Mentally Ill, there is a limit as to how far and how long those funds can carry us.

We are turning now to the Oakland County Mental Health Board for funds to continue our fine programs and services for persons with mental illness. Without those funds, we will no longer be able to put persons to work or support the clubhouse activities.

Again, thank you for your support in getting the word out about Our House. I only hope that in the coming year Our House will continue to thrive and be the place "where everybody knows your name."

C. Gregory Olszta, director
Our House

Union becomes issue

MEA, the Michigan teachers' union, has finally and rightfully become an issue in state education reform.

As an ex-teacher and member of a family which places the utmost value on education, I want to see truly good teachers receive compensation commensurate with the crucial role they play in our society and in the lives of our children.

As a businessman, I want to see value for our education dollars. I want to see children who learn and whose thirst for learning is nurtured by our schools.

I believe that we can have both value and an adequately compensated professional teaching corps.

Education reform does not mean paying teachers less. It does not mean shortchanging our children. It should mean rewarding teachers with a full measure of recognition for their professional work and children with the vision of and preparation for a bright future.

Education reform may mean weeding out excessive costs due to union monopoly, teachers who are less than professional, duplicate services, questionable programs, administrative waste.

It should mean involving families and businesses in an enterprise which so profoundly affects our community and ourselves throughout our lives.

R. Thomas Hunter, Ph.D., Bloomfield Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
What's your New Year's resolution?

We asked this question at the Farmington branch library.



"I haven't even thought about that yet."
Scott Johnston
Westland



"Next year I'd like to go for the student council and be president (at Hillside Elementary)."
Stacey Schreeder, 8
Farmington Hills



"That's a good question. I haven't thought about it yet."
Sarah Escott
Farmington



"I want to do better in school."
Amy Escott
Farmington

The Farmington Observer

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