

2 concerns People ignored; no debate

We support Proposal A in the important school-funding election on March 15.

An editorial outlining our stand appeared Feb. 17 on this page. There are many good reasons to support Proposal A. Among them are it will lock into the Michigan Constitution the rule that the sales and use tax increase will go into the school aid fund. That money cannot be raised by the Legislature and diverted to any other use such as prisons, perks or pensions. It's reserved for schools.

The vote on Proposal A is March 15, less than a month away. So how about you? Figured out how're you voting yet? Will it be Proposal A (increased sales tax) or the statutory backup plan (hiked state income tax) for you?

Whatever pip you decide to punch on March 15, you won't be voting to keep the property tax to fund your schools. The state Legislature, in its infinite wisdom, isn't giving you that option.

If you're still scratching your head over this school funding mess (we think the word is not misused), you're certainly not alone.

Most of us have been stepping and fetching since July when the Legislature up and abolished \$6.9 billion worth of property taxes that had been supporting our schools.

The Legislature made this bizarre move without so much as a by-your-leave to the state's voters. It was simply, wham-bam! . . . the property tax is dead, long live its successor.

You may be wondering what was wrong with the trusty property tax, which has supported our schools so well over the decades.

School districts like Farmington that have been well-funded and well-managed have thrived using property taxes. Are such districts going to benefit under the new regime? A lot of studies seem to indicate that they are not.

So much hasn't been adequately explained about this latest attempt at school finance re-

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form. Many questions haven't been answered, foremost among them:

A. Why weren't Michigan's voters given the chance to vote on something as important as the abolition of the property tax as the source of school funding?

B. Why has there been so little local debate on this crucial issue?

The Legislature is clearly the source of the problem described in Question A. The will of the people — who have voted down every other attempt at funding change over the last 25 years — has been shamefully ignored here.

It's as if the bully-boys (and girls) in Lansing are telling us we're not capable of making such an important decision. So they'll make it for us.

Question B's problem could have been solved by sponsoring some pro-con debates on the issue. It would have been interesting to see state Rep. Jan Dolan, part of the thundering herd that trampled the property tax, go one-on-one with state Sen. Jack Faxon, who opposes the plan.

Such a debate could have been covered by the Observer and cablecast (again and again) on the local-access cable TV. Maybe then we'd have some answers. But it never happened.

So where were the League of Women of Women Voters, the Republican and Democratic clubs and the others who usually get so involved with local forums around election time?

Vote for Proposal A — it is a good deal for public schools and it eases the burden of school property taxes for most people. And hope it works.

Marketing ploy a useful tool

When someone advises you to "call New York," it's usually a sarcastic inference that you're incapable of handling things yourself.

Well, some Oakland County folks did call New York — actually The Wall Street Journal — recently. But, in so doing, they lead us to believe that they're handling things just fine.

Oakland County will be the subject of a 12-page advertising supplement in the Journal. Stories and pictures will tell and show how good it is to live and do business in Oakland County.

The supplement makes Oakland County look good. A similar effort could do the same for Wayne County, we believe.

Oakland County is the fifth wealthiest in United States, according to one estimate, and is certainly "the epicenter of business in Michigan" in the words of Ken Rogers, the economic development director for county government who helped secure the deal with the Journal.

The supplement will appear tomorrow, Friday, Feb. 25, in Wall Street Journals that are sold in 15 Midwestern states.

If Rogers and Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson are smiling over this deal, it could be because all the positive publicity about their turf apparently didn't cost the county one single tax dollar.

The Wall Street Journal wrote the stories, took the photographs and sold the advertisements that appear in the supplement.

That's fine with us. Oakland County is blow-

ing its horn on somebody else's battery juice. But the important thing is that the horn gets tooted and the county's story gets told to some very important Midwestern readers who are concerned with business.

And, if it works in Oakland County, why not try it in Wayne County, too? After all, western Wayne County is certainly no slouch when it comes to providing good places to work and do business.

When Ed McNamara was mayor of Livonia, we remember, the city administration engaged in a lot of one-on-one promotion, advertising and recruiting.

Such efforts haven't been very noticeable for a long while south of Eight Mile and west of Telegraph. It's time to revive them, and something like this Wall Street Journal supplement would be a good way to do it.

"We think it (the Journal supplement) is an opportunity for everyone to explore," said Oakland County's Rogers.

Rogers said he thinks the Oakland supplement will recur next year and the year after and so on.

"It's a demonstration of government not settling for the status quo," he said. "We need to find new ways to talk to the people we want to do business with. We're trying to do new things, getting off with the old and on with the new."

Flower power



Make believe it's spring: No matter what the weather is like outside, a few flowers like these irises being collected by shop assistant Lois Bierman at McFarland Florist on Grand River in Farmington Hills have the power to bring spring indoors.

LETTERS

He supports 'A'

As a career public school educator since 1958, I endorse the March 15 reform tax choice, Proposal A, for two main reasons. Point one: What it will do, Proposal A is the only ballot choice that will give a constitutionally guaranteed legacy to the Michigan's children, who are our future, and deserve to have school tax protected for their school use.

Point two: What it will do, Proposal A is the only ballot choice that will not allow senior citizens, middle-income citizens, and lower-income citizens to be taxed out of their homes by a simple majority of the lawmakers or by double-digit assessment increases.

Ken Cooper, Farmington Hills

He's against 'A'

I must respectfully disagree with your Feb. 17 editorial in support of Proposal A.

You could not have been thinking of the communities and school districts in which the Observer circulates when you decided to back a Proposal that is flawed in several ways.

As a resident of the Farmington School District, I am concerned that Proposal A has overstated the projected revenue from the various tax proposals by upwards of \$500 million.

That's a substantial shortfall that will have to be made up by higher taxes or lower revenues for local schools.

Even before Proposal A is put to a vote, more than \$200 million has been taken away from revenues by the change in the property transfer tax. While the change is laudable, the money lost is not replaced and will come out of the budgets of local school districts.

More shortfall will take place because of the over-reliance on a 50-cent-per-pack cigarette (tax) increase that will surely result in a drop in use and a drop in revenue.

When we have the 1994 version of the lottery for education proposal — the institution of another game of chance — keno, to finance education. Since lottery is already at the saturation point, it is inconceivable that keno will raise anywhere near the \$100 million claimed by the supporters of Proposal A.

Let's look at the question of tax equity. Your editorial argues that the sales tax is not regressive, yet your own newspaper printed a chart which showed that lower-income families spend twice as much of their income on sales taxable items as do those in the higher income brackets.

A sales tax increase also means that an estimated \$300 million to \$500 million in lost deductibility will go to the federal government each year instead of remaining in the pocketbooks of Michigan taxpayers. The backup plan further increased equity by increasing personal exemptions from \$2,100 to \$3,000, lessening the effects of an income tax increase.

The personal exemption for senior citizens will be increased from \$3,000 to \$3,900 per person. This is the group that would be hit hardest by the Proposal A sales tax increase.

You make the point that you prefer the sales tax increase because it would be imbedded in the Constitution. As a city council member in Farmington Hills, that worries me because of a language change in the sales tax proposal that could adversely affect our city's revenue-sharing funds.

The present language guarantees that 15 percent of the 4-percent sales tax is mandated to be used for return to the cities in the form of revenue sharing. The Proposal A language removes this guarantee.

What worries me is that last October Gov. John Engler tried to eliminate all non-constitutionally guaranteed revenue sharing. It took a massive lobbying effort on the part of our city council and the Michigan Municipal League to reverse that decision.

Without the firm constitutional guarantee, I am concerned that at the first budget shortfall there would be a raid on the sales tax revenue-sharing funds.

These funds account for 16 percent of our city budget. The funds are used for police and fire protection and other vital services. This language change was one of the major reasons why the board of directors of the Michigan Municipal League is urging a No vote on Proposal A. I wholeheartedly agree.

Aldo Vagnozzi, Farmington Hills

More tax and spend

What we are looking at in the Clinton health care plan is the granddaddy of all tax-and-spend programs.

With the Office of Management and Budget's disclosure that the Clinton Health Care Plan will be funded as a non-budget entitlement program, and the fact that it will cost the American people well over any estimate put forth by the Clinton administration, the best thing that the Congress can do with the plan is to delete pages 1 through 1,342 and begin anew.

We are talking of adding \$70 billion to the deficit with this program. That is not what Bill Clinton was sent to Washington to do.

It is absolutely ludicrous to think that government could manage a program of this size and not waste millions of dollars in taxpayers' money.

Kim D. Janke, Farmington

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 favorite Olympic sport?

We asked this question at the Farmington City Hall.



"I like downhill skiing, the luge, hockey. I look forward to the winter Olympics." Sharon Maggard, Livonia



"I like the luge and speed skating." Debbie Comini, Farmington



"Bobsled and luge. There's a lot of action in those sports. I saw the movie 'Cool Running' and it sparked my interest." Matt Law, Pontiac



"Ice skating. I used to do a lot of it when the rink was by the sledding hill in Farmington." Chris Dwyer, Farmington

The Farmington Observer

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