

POINTS OF VIEW

SMART provides service despite budget cuts

This week, there will be 200,000 reasons to save the SMART bus system. Maybe you know some of them. Walter Vendittelli of Warren is one. He's 73 years old and still works full time at Henry Ford Hospital, getting up at 4:30 a.m. to ride the bus to work every morning.

He prides himself on being vital and productive, but will lose his only way to work and be forced to retire if the SMART millage vote fails June 6th. "I hate the word 'retire'—that's a word that makes people old," Mr. Vendittelli says as he campaigns vigorously for the bus millage.

Or maybe you know Florence Felong of Southfield who can only get to a Clawson nursing home every day to care for her ailing sister because of the SMART bus.

Or Lenore Corkum of Oxford who, despite suffering from multiple sclerosis, works as a greeter at the Clarkston Kmart in her electric wheelchair—also will lose her job without the SMART bus.

Or maybe you know Mary Kaiser of Dearborn, a senior citizen who needs medical treatment for her ailing leg and would have to spend \$40 a cab trip to her medical treatment. "SMART's

my only way of getting to the doctor without using my food money," she says.

Two hundred thousand trips a week—that's what SMART is providing today. And we've been doing it despite major federal budget cuts for transit, as Washington declared that local communities needed to operate and fund their own bus systems.

We've cut our costs three straight years and increased our ridership 21 straight months, a record unmatched nationally. Last year a national study by New York City declared SMART's maintenance/inventory system the

most efficient in the United States.

We've done all we can without local tax support. No transit system in the country operates without local tax support and this May, without your help, we'll be forced to shut down.

I've been asked hundreds of times why I've continued to stay on as the unpaid "interim" General Manager of SMART for three years now, in addition to my county responsibilities.

There are 200,000 reasons a week. Maybe someone you care for is among them. Maybe they're all someone else's friends or family.

For me, the emotional story of the

man who told the Macomb Board of Commissioners how he lost his job when his company moved out of town continues to haunt me. He said: "I never thought I'd ever ride the bus. Now I've learned that we're all just one bad break away from thanking God the buses are there."

The cost of the ¼ mill tax to the owner of a \$100,000 home is \$16 a year. The election is June 6th.

The lines at the polls won't be long. I hope you'll come out and help us.

Michael Duggan is interim general manager of SMART and Wayne County Deputy Executive.

LETTERS

Richard is wrong

Tim Richard unmasked his ignorance in his April 13 column "Reduce drunken driving by changing our lifestyles."

Richard denounced tough laws and harsh punishment toward those who drink and drive. He asserts that tough laws do not have any impact on reducing the number of drunken drivers.

Instead, Richard proclaims that changing our lifestyles would have greater impact. He suggests that Americans should adopt a three-hour "tea time" during the afternoon, as they do in England.

Richard's logic is that bar patrons could not spend an entire day drinking because bars would shut down for "tea-time closing." In addition, Richard argues that more neighborhood bars would reduce the number of drunken drivers because patrons could walk to and from the bar.

At first I thought he was joking. However, Richard's futile attempt to support his ideas revealed that he intended to be taken seriously. It is obvious that Richard did not research the issue of drunken driving before advocating his convoluted ideas.

One inquiry to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration would have disclosed the seriousness of drunken driving. According to NHTSA, traffic accidents are the greatest single cause of death in the U.S. for every age category between 6 and 33.

Nearly half of those accidents involve alcohol. NHTSA reports that nearly 250,000 Americans died at the hands of drunken drivers between 1982-1992.

Furthermore, had Richard closely examined documented studies, he would have learned that stiffer penalties for drunken driving have been instrumental in reducing the number of people who died in alcohol related accidents by 20 percent in 1990 compared to 1980.

Americans are fed up with the havoc that drunken drivers wreak on our highways. Across the nation, people are embracing harsher laws targeted at drunken drivers.

Warren's new ordinance that confiscates the automobiles of those driving drunk with a suspended license serves as a prime example. Americans clearly understand that people who drink and drive while above the legal alcohol limit are criminals and should be treated as such.

Richard contradicts himself by conceding that "we need new tough laws to avoid drunken driving, but I have my doubts about harsher punishments for drunken drivers after the accident." That's like saying we need tough laws to prevent murder, but if someone commits a murder, they should elude harsh punishment.

Richard is out of step with reality. Not once did he mention the notion of personal accountability. Not once did he mention the exorbitant cost of drunken driving on our society.

Richard's limited understanding of this issue is obvious. What is not as obvious is why Phil Power continues to publish the irrelevant nonsense that Tim Richard so regularly spews.

Raymond Dublin, Farmington Hills

On school code

This is an open letter to Gov. John Engler.

Dear Gov. Engler: I would like to be considered for appointment to the next available judicial vacancy.

I have absolutely no training or experience on the legal field; however, my education credentials are excellent. If lawyer Michael David Warren, with no training or experience in the field of education, can be selected to re-write the Michigan School Code, then it is logical to assume that an excellent teacher would also make an excellent judge.

Unfortunately, I did not have the foresight to become involved in the new politically correct organizations, such as those with right-wing Libertarian leanings while I was in college. Therefore, my request will probably be ignored.

I will continue to do an excellent job educating children in the classroom unless prohibited by the Michigan School Code of the future.

Marie W. Weigold, Farmington Hills

Stop illegals

Dear senator or representative: Right now as many as three million illegal aliens are entering our country each year. The illegal alien crisis is costing me and all taxpayers billions of dollars for welfare, public housing, unemployment, free health care and bilingual education.

Illegal aliens are also responsible for much of the drug trafficking that is destroying our children.

As a taxpayer from your voting district, I urge you to support H.R. 387 to assign military troops to assist the Border Patrol in stopping illegal aliens at our border.

I also urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 373 to bring legal immigration quotas back down to a reasonable level, say 300,000 at the most, not millions.

George Strelczuk, Farmington Hills

Why pick fight?

In watching a recent Farmington Hills Council meeting, I was intrigued by the discussion (initiated by Councilperson Nancy Bates) concerning the appointment of persons to boards and commissions by the mayor.

Bates indicated that her constituents had voiced a concern to her about the to-be-elected mayor having the opportunity to appoint members to boards and commissions for a period of up to four years.

Bates, recognizing the City Charter mandates (in at least four sections) that the mayor shall appoint and members, remained of the opinion that the procedure should be changed to protect the potential appointee and her constituents.

Various other council members then chimed in with their respective positions, and the public was also allowed the opportunity to address the issue.

It is curious to this writer that the very issue the council now faces as a possible problem with the direct election of the mayor was raised by me in opposition to the council's desire to change the charter allowing for the election of the mayor by the voters (not because I was opposed to the people electing their mayor, but because I didn't believe the process had been well thought out—for instance, if a sitting council member is elected mayor, do the residents realize that person's replacement on council will be selected by council—not by the voters?)

So, instead of welcoming the new mayor-to-be, instead of presuming the best, instead of extending their hands in friendship and cooperation, certain current members of council chose instead to throw down the gauntlet and pick a fight. When will the voters finally realize that a change in personnel and attitude is necessary on the council?

May I suggest, Nov. 7, 1995?

Paul R. Sowerby, Farmington Hills

At last, we can measure a school's performance

The Michigan Department of Education last week released its first-ever list of state-accredited schools.

Although complex and very bureaucratic—the department's question and answer guidelines ran to nearly eight pages, single-spaced—this is the first time all Michigan public schools have been rated by a common standard: comparative success in a series of MEAP (Michigan Education Assessment Program) tests.

Of Michigan's 3,600 schools, only 145 received the highest rating—"summary accreditation." Locally, Highmeadow Common and Hillside Elementary School were top-ranked, a terrific accomplishment.

Around 3,000 schools received "interim accreditation," which means they are making progress, but more improvement is needed in next year's test round to keep up.

Of the 89 schools that received no accreditation, next year's results will be crucial. If they continue unaccredited, they could lose up to 6 percent of their state per-pupil aid. Continued poor performance could result in having principals removed and students transferred to accredited schools. Locally, no schools were unaccredited.

For the first time, schools that fail to measure up will get hurt. That alone is good news for those who realize Michigan's schools need substantial improvement. As state superintendent of public instruction Robert Schiller said, "This is the first opportunity for us to shine the light on those who are doing it well and those who are not."

All this comes about while a fierce debate is raging about how best to reform schools. Very broadly, the argument is between those who think that improvement can best come about by letting the forces of market competition determine which schools survive and which die and those who hold that it's possible to reform the public school system in Michigan without destroying it.

For those readers who are interested in some factual background to this debate, here's a compilation that might be useful.

Michigan has some 800 local school districts with more than 3,600 schools serving 1.6 million students. An additional 190,000 children go to non-public schools.



PHILIP POWER

Each local board of education sets its own courses, credits and graduation requirements. Michigan joins only Nebraska and Wyoming in this extraordinary degree of local control. In the other 47 states, courses, credits and graduation requirements are set statewide.

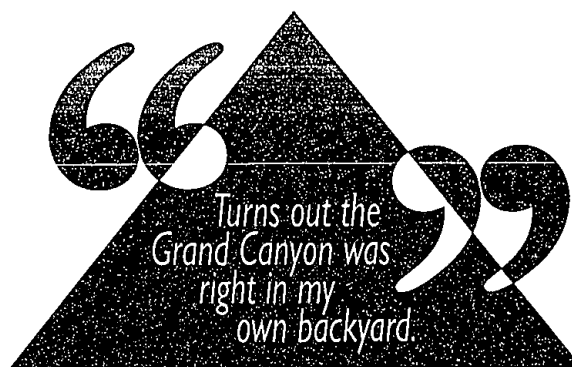
Each local school district picks its textbooks, determines class organization and size, and hires and evaluates its teachers. The last state to do so, Michigan in 1993 mandated teacher evaluation.

Given the high degree of local control, it's not surprising that Michigan schools therefore vary enormously in student achievement, parental expectation, standards and services. We have some of the finest schools, best teachers and most able students in the nation. We also have some schools, teachers and students whose failures are chronic.

Through the MEAP test, we at last have a single uniform tool to measure what kids actually learn in all 3,600 Michigan schools. MEAP isn't the best test, but some objective test is better than no test.

And now, through the accreditation process, the results of MEAP tests are being brought together for our schools, building by building. That's a big step forward, one that parents, teachers, students and employers should applaud.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-3047, Ext. 1880.



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