

POINTS OF VIEW

Five-letter word spells 'no,' says township trustee

Editor's note: The following guest column was submitted by Michael Alan Schwartz, a West Bloomfield resident who serves on the township's board of trustees.

Trust: a five-letter word which encompasses the essence of the relationship which should exist between citizens and their government.

The citizens give up certain rights and allow themselves to be subject to regulations and controls imposed by government based upon trust that the government will be responsive to the will of the people. That is the quintessence of the social compact by which we allow ourselves to be governed.

In May 1994, the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Commission, which is separately elected from the Township Board, held a special election costing \$40,000 to put a question to the voters: to wit: do the citizens want to pay for a Recreation Activities Center building? By a vote of 80 percent to 20 percent, the citizens unequivocally said "NO!" It was the most resounding defeat of any

proposal in the history of West Bloomfield. The RAC clearly and convincingly having been rejected by the citizens, Parks and Rec decided to flout the will of the people and build it anyway.

Incredibly, in October 1994, without sufficient money to build the RAC, Parks and Rec signed a contract with a builder to construct the building. By the summer of 1995, the builder had constructed four walls and a roof — a mere shell as there was no concrete floor and no interior construction of any kind to speak.

In July 1995, without sufficient funding to complete the building, Parks and Rec tried to raid the Land Acquisition Fund to come up with money for the RAC. That fund, which had been created by a millage approved by the citizens in 1986, was for the purchase of park land. It was never contemplated by the citizens that tax money generated by the millage would be used to erect a RAC, which is an administrative building with meeting rooms costing a total of about \$1.5 million. Trustees on the township board,

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learning that the park money was about to be siphoned off to build the RAC, froze those funds.

Parks and Rec then initiated a lawsuit against the township board, at great expense to the taxpayers, to unfreeze those funds. Parks and Rec lost that lawsuit. In ruling against Parks and Rec, Judge Alice Gilbert of the Oakland County Circuit Court noted that "the voters of the township expressly denied (Parks and Rec) the right to secure the necessary funding to construct a recreation activities center."

Having been prevented from snatching money from the Land Acquisition Fund, Parks and Rec now seeks to raid the Sports Park Fund to build the RAC. The Sports Park Fund was created by a millage approved by the voters in 1990 to acquire land and develop baseball and

soccer fields for our community's youth. When that millage was approved, it was never contemplated by the voters that their tax money would be used to erect a RAC. Nevertheless, on Nov. 27, 1995, five members of the township board decided to approve a Parks and Rec budget which allows the raiding of the Sports Park Fund.

Even though the voters approved the Sports Park millage five years ago, not one square inch of ball park has been built. Not one Little League or soccer game has been played on the land which was to have been developed under the Sports Park millage.

While the Parks & Rec has been hell-bent to build the RAC building, the sports field project, designed to benefit the children of West Bloomfield, has been allowed to languish. Parks and Rec is now saying that they hope that the sports field will be ready in 1997. Maybe yes and maybe no. Parks and Rec claims that bids for development of the sports fields exceed its ability to pay. By remov-

ing \$400,000 from the Sports Park Fund to build the RAC, even less money is available for the baseball and soccer fields.

TRUST: That is what the debate is all about. Should Parks & Rec be bailed out by betraying the voters' trust and skimming money from earmarked millages in order to build the RAC which the voters rejected? When an election is held and the voters decisively reject funding for the RAC, does government have the right to ignore the voters' expressed wishes?

Parks and Rec, with the sole, honorable exception of Bernadine Edwards, and five out of seven members of the township board, appear to be willing to sacrifice principle and to betray the trust of the citizens of West Bloomfield in favor of expediency in order to bail Parks and Rec out of the mess which Parks and Rec created for itself. I am not willing to join in such opportunism. In the end, the voters will have to decide whether they will tolerate such conduct by those in whom they have invested their trust.

Voice of reason explains education reform control

It is the season . . . And so it was nice to get a letter from state Rep. Thomas Kelly, whose district includes parts of Garden City and Westland. Kelly is a Democratic member of the House Education Committee, the site of some of the fiercest battles over school reform. "I find myself in a quandary," Kelly's letter begins, "trying to understand the absence of qualitative reporting by the media with reference to many defining issues facing our society today."

"In my position as a state representative, I rely on being able to access as much information as possible so I can make reasonable and sensible decisions. I have access to many, many newspapers published in the state . . . Unfortunately, I have concluded that for some reason the press is unconcerned with the assault on education and, therefore, does not seem to care about the destruction being inflicted.

"You, sir, are the only voice in the

journalistic wilderness who dares to address this subject in a logical and reasonable way. Why are you the lone writer? . . . Is it really because the issue isn't sensational or sexy? Is it because it doesn't sell?"

Thank you, Rep. Kelly. I get a lot of response to this column, some positive and some negative, some reasoned and some purely emotional. It's gratifying to be called "logical and reasonable" at least once this year. You may be certain I'll show your nice letter to my wife.

Frankly, I'm not sure just why the big city papers don't pay much attention to what's going on in education today. Certainly things like amending the state School Code or tinkering with the numbers of charter schools don't lend themselves to blaring headlines or prodigies of investigative reporting.

But they do have a profound effect



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on what our kids learn in school and what kinds of skills they have when they leave school. And that, in turn, bears profoundly on whether graduates can support their families on the jobs they get and whether their Michigan employers can compete effectively in a global economy.

I suppose this newspaper, focused as it is on the gritty reality of hometown

events, is predisposed to be especially concerned about what happens to kids who attend our local schools. Big city papers don't have that same focus, which might explain why they tend to concentrate on the big story instead of the little pieces of everyday reality that make up lives for most of us.

Here's an example, Rep. Kelly, of what you said at your House Education Committee meeting last Wednesday. It's a story that did not make the big city papers.

You and your colleagues were working on a bill passed by the Senate that would amend the state School Code, going so far as to eliminate statewide curriculum standards and removing the cap on charter schools. Some moderates on the committee, Republicans and Democrats, were arguing that the changes went too far, did too much damage, had no real evidence to back them up.

Suddenly, a note was passed to the committee chair, Rep. William Bryant,

R-Grosse Pointe Farms, summoning Republican members to Gov. John Engler's office two floors down. Half an hour later, dissent quelled and votes for the code changes all lined up, the committee voted to restore the pet provisions.

"The intent is obviously to carry out the remainder of the governor's order," said committee vice chair, James Agee, D-Muskegon. "I was prepared to support this until you left the room and somebody else told you what to do."

Kelly had his own take: "This is nothing but destructive. What we've done here solidifies my view that it's being done for the purpose of vouchers and parochialism."

One wonders whether things will be as easy to wire when the bill comes to the full House this week. I sure hope not.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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