

## POINTS OF VIEW

## In the WL district, 3 strikes and you're at bat

After having been rejected by the voters on three separate occasions, the Walled Lake School Board is at it again. For the fourth time, they are seeking to raise taxes on the citizens, this time for \$114 million for unnecessary building and other enormous projects.

The school board wants a tax increase of 2.78 mills to be levied for each of the next 25 years.

Translated into real dollars, this amounts to \$278 per year for a family whose house has a state equalized value of \$160,000 for a total of \$6,950 per family over the life of the millage.

Why should the average family pay a bounty of \$6,950 so that the Walled Lake School Board, which has not demonstrated excellence in educating our children, can engage in immense and unnecessary building projects.

The \$114 million - that's \$114,000,000 - does not include the interest that must be paid on the bond. The actual amount is more like a quarter billion dollars. I bet the school board did not mention that little item, either.

Now, the school board has attempted to get the taxpayers to fork over this

money three times before. Each time, the voters said a resounding "no." Three strikes and you're out - except if the Walled Lake School Board is trying to grab more money for itself. Then we witness the sorry spectacle of special election after special election, called at weird times.

For example, this multi million dollar bond tax issue is being held on Saturday, Sept. 28. Only 5 weeks later, we have a general election when the highest turnout of voters in a 4-year cycle can be anticipated.

Why doesn't the school board put their tax proposal on Nov. 6 with the general election? If Nov. 6 is good enough for the election of the president and senators and congressmen, why isn't it good enough for the Walled Lake school tax proposal?

Why doesn't the school board want the maximum number of voters to cast their votes on this multi million dollar tax proposal?

If the school tax election were held on Nov. 5, not only would there be a maximum turnout, but the expense of a special election, which will cost the taxpay-

## GUEST COLUMN



RICHARD ANDICH

ers tens of thousands of dollars to hold, would be saved.

Additionally, the school board is deceiving the citizens by claiming that a bond proposal is not the same as a tax proposal.

Changing the name does not change the fact. If it looks like a skunk and it walks like a skunk, calling it a black and white cat does not change the smell. Who is going to pay the bond indebtedness? Where is the \$114,000,000 going to come from? Who will pay the interest on the

\$114,000,000 principal? Who will be continuing to pay on this bond proposal until the year 2021?

The school board does not want to answer these questions. Why not? The answer would reveal that the taxpayers of this community will be paying, and paying dearly, for 25 years for the project to the tune of a quarter billion dollars.

While the school board is getting its fourth bite at the apple, they are not doing a very good job of educating our children. Reading, writing, mathematics and science proficiency scores in the Walled Lake School District are worse than in many neighboring districts.

For example, writing scores in Walled Lake are worse than in Waterford, Novi, West Bloomfield, and Farmington. They were also worse than in Holly, Berkley, Clarkston, Allen Park, Flat Rock, Garden City, Harper Woods, Northville and a number of other districts. Even Romulus and Dearborn have better scores than Walled Lake!

As a whole, Walled Lake does not measure up to districts in Utica, Troy, Rochester, not to mention West Bloom-

field, Birmingham, Farmington, Novi, Plymouth-Canton, Northville, Grosse Pointe, Bloomfield Hills and a number of others. Even Royal Oak does better in science than Walled Lake!

Take a look at the Detroit News of Sept. 13, 1996 - this sorrowful state of affairs is reported there.

The Walled Lake School Board needs to give more emphasis to teaching basic subjects, like math, reading, writing and science.

Why is it that less than half of Walled Lake students have minimal proficiency in these subjects, according to MEAP results?

The blame is not with the students. It's with the school board. Children cannot learn what they are not taught.

If the Walled Lake School Board wants a passing grade from the voters, maybe it should devote more time toward ensuring that our children are prepared sufficiently to receive a passing grade in fundamentals.

Richard Andich is a resident of the Walled Lake School district.

## WL district desperately needs newer facilities

It's really pretty simple. A community grows rapidly for many reasons - location, natural amenities, good schools, attractive homes, low interest rates - bringing an influx of young families wanting something more for their children and themselves. School enrollments swell. Space in school buildings disappears.

The superintendent, after pondering reports from committees of teachers, support staff, administrators and hundreds of interested citizens, recommends solutions to the board of education that include a bond election to approve the building of more schools. The school board puts the question before the voters.

But, then what?

In Walled Lake Schools, the first bond election to begin to address enrollment growth was approved by voters in 1989. The second bond proposal, to complete the projects needed, has been unsuccessful three times since 1993. Now our

space shortage has become a crisis.

Why? No one, not even bond opponents, argues with our well-documented burgeoning enrollment and the space shortage it creates. We're told we're the fastest growing district in Michigan - not surprising considering our nearly 5,000 new children over the past 10 years.

But when we get to the school board's recommended building program, some outspoken critics emerge directly attacking the bond projects and advocating more radical positions.

They concentrate on alleged lack of community input despite the fact that the bond proposals have been the result of study by hundreds of community volunteers and school district staff devoted to finding cost-effective solutions.

They attempt to rewrite history as they impugn the rationale and stated specifications of the 1989 building program despite pre-election literature which clearly stated the purpose and

## GUEST COLUMN



DR. JAMES GEISLER

size of all projects, as well as a clear commitment to a future bond issue to address continued enrollment growth. They advocate "bare-bones" construction with its built-in future high maintenance costs, or adopting year-round

multi-track programs despite the upheaval and disruption that it would create for students and their families. Even if these were attractive alternatives, they are years away from implementation and do nothing to solve the problems we have today. In short, it's wishful thinking.

The fact is this community desperately needs new school facilities. A bond issue is needed to fund the construction of these new facilities to provide adequate schools for children and protect property values.

The school district has exhausted all temporary solutions to the space crunch. The remaining "solutions" - larger class size, double shifts, more busing of students out of attendance areas - will result in reduced quality of education, reduced quality of life and reduced property values.

In the final analysis, it's really not so complicated. For a few pennies a day, Walled Lake voters have the opportuni-

ty on Sept. 28 to maintain its good school system, and continue the American tradition of public education on which our country's success has been built.

This responsibility, including the funding of school construction, ensures an educated population which will lead our society 10, 20 and 30 years from now.

They will be the future work force, the future taxpayers and the future funders of your social security, the future voters and caretakers of the children born into their communities.

Let's hope the example we set at the polls this month is one our community can be proud of and one our children will remember and carry into the future!

James R. Geisler, Ph.D., is Superintendent of Walled Lake Consolidated Schools.

## Educational races don't get the coverage, attention they deserve

Take it from me, I've been there.

The best known cure for a political swelled head is to run for one of the education posts that are elected statewide every two years.

It makes no difference whether you're running for the University of Michigan Board of Regents, Michigan State University Board of Trustees, Wayne State University Board of Governors or a seat on the State Board of Education. The reaction always is the same: "You're who? You're running for what?"

The system is bizarre. Nobody knows who you are or what office you're running for, let alone what your credentials might be or what your views on education might be.

With the Nov. 6 ballot crowded with sexier and, to be sure, more important races, media coverage of the educational races is meager. Radio and TV ignore the contests entirely. Excepting endorsements in the Detroit papers and the Booth News-papers, editorial analysis is perfunctory.

This year, the only news coverage given the nomination of candidates for education posts earned a quarrel at the Republican convention over whether a hitherto unknown lawyer with impeccable anti-abortion credentials should displace a distinguished woman from Grand Rapids who happens to be pro-choice. (He did. Please help me, somebody, by explaining what on earth one's views on abortion have to do with higher education policy.)

With the candidates and their views so little known, it's not surprising that few people bother to vote for educational posts. The usual falloff from the vote for governor to the vote for university boards is more than 20 percent.

This is too bad, because people on state education boards make a big difference. University boards deal with things like college tuition and whether a new football coach is more important than recruiting a new physics professor. The current State Board of Education is busy boosting charter schools and trying to bust the constitutional prohibition against public funds being spent on religious schools.

Over the years, I've tried to change things. I even wrote to my colleagues at the Michigan Press Association, suggesting that MPA sponsor a candidates night to make it convenient for reporters to listen to the candidates. "After much discussion," the turnaround letter read, "the board determined that providing such a forum for statewide candidates would not serve the interest of all our members and is more properly the responsibility of the candidates and their parties."

So much for the news media.

Now comes the Livonia branch of the American



PHILIP POWER

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Association of University Women trying to make things better. On Thursday, Sept. 26, in Livonia City Hall, the AAUW is holding a bipartisan, issues-based candidates forum. Beginning at 6 a.m., they will interview successively candidates for U-M, State Board of Education, MSU and Wayne State.

More important, they've arranged with Time-Warner Cable, the outfit that has the Livonia cable TV franchise, to videotape the entire program. These tapes will be made available, for free, to all multiple systems cable TV operators in Michigan after Oct. 1.

So if you want a unique opportunity to learn about the various candidates for state education offices, call your local cable system and ask them to get the tapes and show 'em. And while you're at it, call this newspaper and ask it to publicize the show with date, time and channel.

Then, if you're anything like me, you'll give a big cheer for Time-Warner, the Livonia AAUW, together with coordinators Yvonne Conostas and Carol Dubuque, for their valuable public service. This program is something that should become a regular part of every election year.

In addition to being chairman of the company that owns this newspaper, Philip Power is an elected regent of the University of Michigan. Time-Warner Cable in Livonia can be reached at (313) 422-2819. Ms. Conostas can be reached at (313) 281-7717 and Ms. Dubuque at (313) 477-0399.

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