



Engler answers readers' questions on roads, education and future

Ask and you shall receive - at least that's how it works in the *You Ask column* we will be featuring regularly in the *Observer & Eccentric*. Here are the questions you asked of Michigan Governor John Engler. He sat down with *Special Projects Editor Margaret O'Brien* in Southfield Monday to give his answers.

Q: Why are the weight limits so high on the loads our trucks are hauling through our state?

Bill and Mary McCauley
Southfield

A: They were set some years ago and they were set as part of the decision to require more axles, so the weight per axle isn't considered high. But, there are more axles allowed. In recognition of the fact that trucks do more damage to the roads than cars, we are recommending, as part of our transportation package, a significant increase in truck registration fees and increases in specific charges for overweight or oversize vehicles. So, we're trying to make sure trucks do pay their fair share. In addition, I signed, in December, legislation that eliminated a discount that had previously been given for diesel fuel, which is the fuel trucks operate on.

Q: Would you consider using prisoners for repairs on our road crews like they do in southern states?

Marjorie Muehrhan
Farmington Hills

A: Well, they have a little different situation, of course. They're working on roads year around down there. We don't quite have the same ability - some of their weather is probably temperate enough that they can probably keep them outside in camps. We use prisoners at the present time to build sidewalks and do some other work. Also we've been careful of what prisoners we use because we don't want dangerous, violent prisoners out where they can have access to the community. I do favor making prisoners work. We have worked very hard trying to expand the number of opportunities where we can put prisoners to work. It's good for them and helps them make a little money to pay room and board or send to the family to help support them.

Q: What are you going to do about those Birmingham parents who are going to exempt their kids, no matter what, from the state proficiency test? Are you willing to take the test yourself and have your results published?

Geoff Luckersmith
Troy

A: I'm willing to have my children take the exam. And, I think that all children ought to be taking the exam. It was developed (by) teachers and educators, who developed the test in conjunction with the Department of Education, so I'm sure they did the best job they could on it. Though, there is a recognition that at any time you start a test that there are going to be some difficulties with that and that there will be, undoubtedly, improvements in the examination as it's given the second time in the coming year. I think it's important to be able to help people understand where they measure up and I think it's important, even for schools like Birmingham, to know where they compare...

Q: As parents of children attending public schools in Oakland County, we want to express our concern that the state has not been honoring its promise that, with the passage of Proposal A, all

school districts would receive an increase in funding in their district foundation grant, equal to or greater than the cost of inflation. When will you offer a budget that provides all public school districts increases in their foundation grants that at least keep pace with inflation?

Joseph and Pauline Koenigsnocht
West Bloomfield

A: We'll be spending \$540 million more on public education next year. That increase is greater than the entire budget for all of Michigan's community colleges and the Department of State Police. So, it's a sizable increase in the education budget. I think it will continue to ensure that there is adequate funding for all of Michigan students. And, in fact, Michigan, like Ohio faces a future where its funding for education is out of the reach of state and federal judges. In Ohio, their current system of funding higher education has been ruled unconstitutional and they're trying to structure a brand new plan. We've avoided those kinds of problems and we're closing the gap... not every district is able to spend what the West Bloomfield school district spends... We've come up to the point where every student in Michigan is in a district spending at least \$5,000 per pupil.

Q: How do you justify Proposal A, which in theory is somewhat socialist, to your Republican party preference?

Suzanne Osmer
Beverly Hills

A: It's hardly that at all. In fact, one only needs to look at Ohio where their entire system of education has been discarded as unconstitutional or New Jersey, where that previously happened, or in any other state. We now have a system of funding public education which allows for all students to be in schools that are adequately funded. And I don't think there is anything socialist about suggesting that all students are entitled to a quality education. I think that is a very fundamental part of our democracy.

Q: What do you plan to do regarding the Michigan Mandate for special education? We'd like to know if you're even considering the possibility of changing it.

Bill Meyers
Farmington Hills

A: Currently, Michigan has one of the most extensive state/federal mandated special education programs in the nation. And we are continuing that. I think, increasingly, there are concerns that the cost of special education is making it the priority of education to the detriment of education of children who may be academically talented or even general education programs. I think that there needs to be efforts to continue to strike an appropriate balance. At this point, there are no suggestions that special education services be curtailed or any mandate be dropped.

Q: Why are we going to pass a bill deregulating the power companies when it's going to be disadvantageous to the consumers in Michigan?

Joseph Pavco
Farmington Hills

A: Well, I don't think anyone is suggesting we deregulate power companies. We'll still have the Public Service Commission. But what is being talked about is a strategy that some states have already been moving forward on - and Michigan has already been very much

involved in the debate - which would allow customers - be they residential or commercial or industrial - to be able to have some choice as to their electricity source in order to take advantage of the lowest possible rates. We're already seeing today in Michigan that many of the larger industrial customers like the automobile companies are entering into long-term contracts to guarantee their rate. Those are contracts that, currently, the individual consumer, like the questioner, do not have the ability to enter into. And I think, just as we saw when natural gas was deregulated a few years ago, that we ended up with great price stability and, in fact, saw decreases in price. I think the same will eventually become the case with respect to electrical power.

Q: Under what authority did you give \$55 million to Detroit without any vote of the Legislature or the voters?

Elaine Gaudier
West Bloomfield Township

A: Under the authority of the Legislature, actually. It was a decision made by the Strategic Fund board which is appointed by the governor. They decide how monies that have been appropriated or received by the state are expended. In this case, monies that came from gambling on Indian reservations as a result of a negotiated settlement in the federal courts, were sufficient to allow a grant in support of the infrastructure of the new stadium to be made. And that was the decision of the strategic fund board. I felt as long as the state would not be involved in the construction of the stadium or the operation of the stadium that a grant for the infrastructure - some of the sewers, some of the environmental cleanup - it could be viewed in the same light (as grants regularly made for plant and industrial investments).

Q: Knowing the governor's and Michelle's commitment to volunteerism, why is the Family Independence Agency considering privatizing or eliminating their volunteer program now, when instead, they should be capitalizing on the publicity from the volunteer summit?

Marilyn Droz
Farmington Hills

A: Well, indeed we are capitalizing on the publicity and there are no plans whatsoever to eliminate volunteer services with the Family Independence Agency. We have a question that the director of the agency is looking at, and I'm supportive of that review. The issue is this: In some offices we have positions that are funded for a volunteer coordinator. The question that's been raised is, couldn't we more successfully integrate the volunteer activities of the FIA with the volunteer possibilities of the community by working the local volunteer offices when those are in existence. In many communities we don't have those offices or access to the office may be difficult.

Q: We in Farmington have strict rules on recy-

cling, so it puzzles us when we read that Michigan allows Canada and several adjoining states to haul their trash into Michigan. We don't understand the logic to this policy. Can you explain?

Ruth Clark
Farmington

A: One has to read the Supreme Court decision (of) a case involving Michigan's law, which was had very strong in its limits on the importation of waste into Michigan, and that was struck under the argument that it was a violation of the federal constitution and the commerce clause. We have, subsequent to that Supreme Court decision, been in Congress lobbying for legislation that would allow states to have more control over their borders. To date, we have been unsuccessful in passing that legislation, but it remains a very high priority and something that I have lobbied members of the Michigan congressional delegation to work on. In this case, I hope the people interested in this topic will take the time to write a letter to their congressmen and senators urging their support.

Q: Why did you run for Governor?

Kryeta Daly
Farmington Hills

A: In 1990 I became a candidate because I was convinced I could do a better job than the person that was in the office. I had a lot of experience in government. There were a lot of ideas I had and a lot of things I wanted to do. And, I was frustrated as a member of the Legislature that some of Michigan's most serious problems weren't being addressed and I felt if I got elected I could do something about them. I've had the good fortune to see some of my dreams realized as governor.

Q: Will you be running for a third term and on what factors will you base your decision?

Michael Dorfman
Farmington Hills

A: I've not decided. Michelle and I are talking about that at the present time. The major factor is what is the best thing for our family - for our three

daughters. From the standpoint of the job itself, I've enjoyed the job very much. While we've accomplished a lot, there are many things I'd like to continue to work on. I'm very challenged everyday, so I'm not the least bit tired of the job of governor. But, at the same time, I have family considerations now that weren't present in the past and that does change the decision for me.

Q: What's new with the triplets?

Sharon Sieboda
West Bloomfield

A: Just their vocabulary, which continues to expand, and their repertoire of songs and how much fun they are - which seems to be increasing every week.

Q: You've become a national figure in the Republican party. Are you planning to run for president or aiming for some other national post?

Gina DeBricat
Waterford

A: I'm still trying to figure out what I'm going to do in 1998.



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