

Farmington Observer

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Millage loss would devastate local schools

'Is there a word worse than 'catastrophic?' That was Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield's response when asked what would happen if a June 11 tax election failed.

finances at their current level, and we support a yes vote without reservation. There will still be a need for collective belt-tightening as slowing growth flattens per-pupil revenues. Our schools will continue to struggle with unfunded state staff and student treatments for special education, which the general fund budget will supplement to the tune of \$3 million in the coming year.

For more information about the ballot proposal, visit the district's Web site, www.farmington.k12.mi.us or call the district (248) 489-3349.

The district is asking voters for the authority to levy 13.7532 mills on homes and 18 mills on non-homestead properties for the next five years to cover operating expenses. There will be no change in tax rates if it's approved; this is the same operating levy voters approved five years ago.

A fterthought: This is a time of year when every single day seems filled with something new to do. Kids are scrambling with tests and last-gasp school activities; homeowners are starting to think about spring fix-up projects; gardeners are spending long hours getting dirt under their fingers, and spring sports keep local ball fields occupied long into the evening hours.

Between now and June 11, we will be presented with a great deal of information about six - count 'em - six candidates for school board and a critical tax renewal. Having already spoken with all the candidates, we can tell you each is prepared to present his or her case.

Some have issues about which they feel strongly, but all have a genuine desire to serve the children educated by Farmington Schools and their families, as well as be responsible to the majority of taxpayers who do not have children in our schools. We urge residents to take the time to attend candidate forums, to read as much as they can and learn about these candidates, who will have oversight for this area's most valuable asset: its children.

Lawmakers should back equitable school funding

Representatives from a western Wayne County-based group pushing for increased state funding for local public schools got hung up on by their legislators last week. Sorry, we're not interested in the message many took away from a forum at Redford Union High School on money problems created by Proposal A.

The session was organized by Michigan Citizens for Fairness in Public School Funding, chaired by Mark Slavens, a Plymouth-Canton Community Schools trustee. School supporters from Plymouth-Canton, Redford Union, South Redford and Livonia were among those at the meeting.

State Rep. Bruce Patterson, R-Canton, the House Majority Floor Leader, in particular took a hard-line (he called it realistic) approach. Patterson told those assembled that changes to Proposal A don't stand a chance in Lansing. "Frankly, you don't have the votes to get something like this through. Those are the cold, hard facts," Patterson said.

In fact, Patterson said the best strategy for the school folks would be to abandon their legislative lobbying effort altogether and instead pursue a statewide ballot initiative. Now that, we note with a chuckle, would truly be tilting at windmills.

But the fact that Patterson's basic position, if not his tone, was echoed by other elected leaders at the forum is truly troubling. It's as if our legislators are throwing up their hands, abdicating some of the responsibilities we gave them when we marked off their name on the ballot.

When Michigan voters passed Proposal A seven years ago - after years of ineffective wrangling over the issue by legislators - the idea was to slowly change the school funding formula so that there was less disparity between the haves and have-nots.

Removing local property taxes as the chief source of school funding, and relying instead on a central kitty from the state, should have gone a long way

toward accomplishing that goal.

And it has in poor, urban and rural, outstate areas. But in our Detroit, canyon-sized gaps in per-pupil spending still exist between competing - sometimes neighboring - school districts. Redford Union, for example, receives \$6,215 per pupil and is facing a \$1.3 million deficit this year due to declining enrollment (another Proposal A "perk" since state aid is tied directly to enrollment).

Meanwhile, Grosse Pointe Public Schools receives \$9,394 per pupil and Birmingham Public Schools gets \$11,378, figures that remain virtually unchanged since Proposal A took effect.

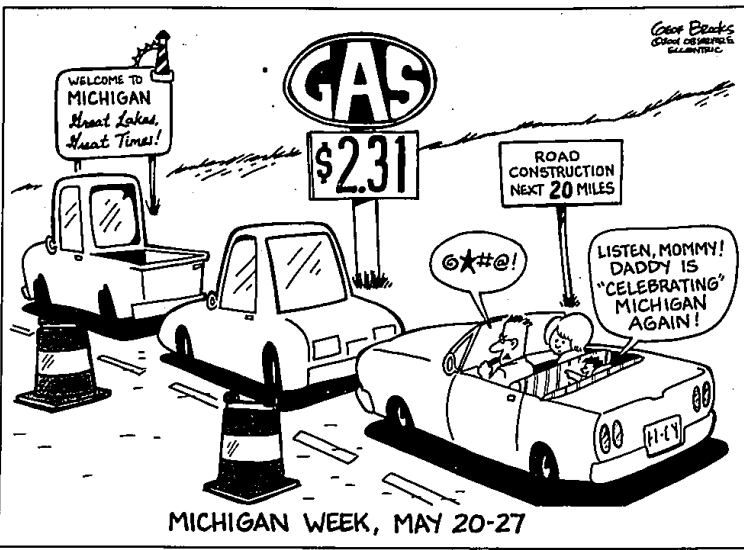
The Observer believes Patterson at least recognizes that the inequities in Proposal A are damaging local schools. Otherwise he wouldn't have introduced legislation on Jan. 31 (House Bill 4111) that would increase the per-pupil Foundation Grant in larger suburban districts.

The bill, which Patterson said least week doesn't have enough support to even make it to committee, calls for larger districts (16,000 students, at least two high schools and average teacher salaries of \$55,000, among other requirements) to receive a minimum Foundation Grant of \$9,000 for the 2001-2002 school year.

A poor reception for one measure though, shouldn't be taken as license to give up on the issue altogether. If fine-tuning the Foundation Grant formula is out of the question, there are other ways to attack funding inequities. For example, if districts were given an 18-month window to pass a hold-harmless millage (something that was permitted when Proposal A kicked in), local voters could have a say in addressing the funding disparity.

There's still something - we hope - in the thinking that we send these folks to Lansing to represent our interests.

And more equitable school funding for local districts certainly falls into that category.



MICHIGAN WEEK, MAY 20-27

LETTERS

Sprawl a factor

On an issue that continues to divide the Sierra Club, an important ballot initiative was narrowly beaten back in April. The referendum would have forced club leaders to stress population growth as a major factor in sprawl.

This would seem an obvious connection, but the sprawl/population issue is sensitive because immigration is by far the chief component of population growth in the United States. According to the U.S. census, the U.S. population is expected to double in the next century from 273 million to 571 million, chiefly as a result of our current immigration policies.

Now taxes for roads and sewage treatment plants twice as many schools will have to be built just to keep up with current, let alone historically high immigration policy. Proponents of the measure argued that the club leadership has been downplaying population growth as a contributor to sprawl "for reasons of political correctness and fund-raising."

For the Sierra Club has about 600,000 members and seems more concerned about raising money for chiefly Democratic political candidates than having anything to do with attacking real environmental concerns. The Sierra Club leadership used undemocratic tactics to defeat the referendum.

Sierra management deleted about half the text of the initiative on the ballot itself in order to make it less likely to pass, and they made it known they expected local leaders to follow the official line. In spite of this, the ballot measure lost by just 54 to 46 percent. It remains to be seen whether the Sierra Club bureaucracy... will see this thin margin as evidence of growing dissatisfaction within the grassroots membership.

Eric Borggaard Farmington Hills

Supports Christian

I have known Pam Christian and her lovely family since they relocated 3 1/2 years ago, and she has already been more involved in the community than many who have lived here their entire life. Through the endless hours she dedicates to Girl Scouts, PTA, and many other school district committees, Pam has demonstrated her leadership ability and sincere commitment to serve others.

From the moment I met Pam, her warmth and honesty impressed me. It was obvious from the start that she has a passion for children and wants to work for the betterment of all. Pam is an intelligent, bright, responsible woman with impeccable ethics and values.

It is in the best interest of the district and community that we elect trustees who have only one agenda - to do what's best for all children. She will be a fantastic addition to the school board.

Robert Stoler Farmington Hills

Supports CCW law

I don't own a gun. I've never applied for a CCW. I am not the NRA.

That being said, I firmly believe that the CCW reform passed by our state government last year was an outstanding piece of public policy. There is something wrong with a system that allows anyone living in Macomb County to get a CCW permit, and at the same time makes it impossible for the citizens of Oakland County to do the same. The reform corrected this and made many other improvements to the system, including mandatory training. But our lawmakers, instead of being thanked for doing an exceptional job, are being vilified.

The People Who Care About Kids Committee are treating gun owners like they're the equivalent of pedophiles. The scare tactics this group have been using are repugnant. I think that the lack of civility in our communities is a far greater danger to my personal safety than a bunch of people packing heat.

However, the anti-gun zealots are perpetually sniveling about theoretical dangers and want us to believe that all law-abiding gun owners are future criminals. That's just sick. Why don't we at least see what the results of the new regulations are before we condemn it? Michigan voters would be wise to vote down any attempt to repeal this legislation.

Christopher M. Cummins Farmington Hills

Defining freedom

After reading Mr. Patrick's letter in the May 3 issue, I feel compelled to respond with what is, undoubtedly, a more widely held definition of "freedom."

This is a great country, and most of its citizens are proud of it. Being "free" is one of the most often mentioned reasons for their pride. But I doubt very much that most citizens of this country, regardless of where they live, equate the widespread and virtually unchecked possession of concealed handguns with freedom.

Freedom is not free! Our freedoms are curtailed every day in many ways, for the common good. Where your freedoms trample on mine (or others), they are limited, and rightly so. Right now, the unfortunate members of society that make up those murdered with handguns are paying the price for those who insist it is their right to carry such weapons as a right.

What price is more difficult to pay, the restrictions on one's capability for deadly force - or the continually rising death toll from handguns that plagues our country like no other. Yes, the Canadians (and the English and the Aussies) are less armed than we (ask them if they feel less free), but let's compare death rates by handgun - PER CAPITA - between the those countries and ours. The numbers are staggering.

As for those people quoted as "astute observers" who champion unencumbered gun distribution, just look at the names. Rush Limbaugh, Charlton Heston and Walter Williams can hardly be considered "diverse." They may look different but are in virtual lockstep on their often extreme view of society.

We also should remember that the catchphrase "cultural war" was coined by Pat Buchanan and has been repeated as mantra for all those seeking an excuse for their intolerance. They don't call 'em "dittoheads" for nothing. Many of our honored veterans gave their lives for this country's ability to

remain free - it seems absurd that so many other citizens must die in order to fulfill a perversion of that concept. This is the stuff of traditional American values? Hardly. Scott Stevenson Farmington

Unfair slap

It is unfortunate that in his zeal to support a law that allows almost anyone to carry a concealed weapon, the Centofanti takes an unfair slap at the police.

I know that from my personal experience, both as mayor and citizen, with the Farmington Hills Police Department that they fight crime as the source and "not pick up the pieces after the fact." Our police department is one of the best, and our police chief, Bill Dwyer, has earned a reputation as one of the outstanding chiefs in the nation.

That's why it is important to note that Chief Dwyer and all the major police organizations in the state are strongly opposed to the "shall issue" concealed weapons bill passed by the Legislature in the darkest moments of the lame duck session, without public input and public discussion.

As someone who took part in gathering signatures to overturn the concealed weapons law, there aren't too many people who are in favor of the bill. It was the easiest petition drive I have ever participated in.

This bill is another example of the state Legislature taking away local control by denying local police a role in the issuing of concealed weapons permits. Who better than the local police to know which persons would pose a danger if they had a concealed weapon?

How many children must die at the hands of a gun before we start to curb the availability of the weapons? How many drivers must we allow to become gun victims of road rage before we come to our senses and say "no" to making more guns available? How many victims of spousal abuse must we allow to be killed by a possessor of a concealed weapon before we say "enough"?

Aldo Vagnozzi Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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