

Farmington Observer

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Rocky has long haul in bid for U. S. Senate

We may have had our differences with state Rep. Andrew Raczowski over the years, but we cannot help but admire his determination.

Against all odds – and to the theme music from the movie "Rocky" – the Farmington Hills native announced his campaign for U. S. Senate Monday morning at Harrison High. If he survives the next 10 months, he'll face veteran Sen. Carl Levin, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee and serves on the Governmental Affairs Committee, the Small Business Committee and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Raczowski knows he's the underdog and admitted he's not always "politically correct." But he is determined to make a strong run at Levin's seat, and now that he's finally decided where he wants to go, we applaud him, with the caveat that he's got a long row to hoe.

The first thing he has to do is become a little more familiar with his opponent. At a Monday press conference announcing his candidacy, Raczowski told a room full of supporters, "What has Carl Levin done in 24 years? I can't tell you what he's done for Michigan."

Levin may not have brought every single federal dollar sent back to Michigan, but he has done plenty, securing millions of federal dollars for mass transit and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, among others.

Levin has earned praise for his bi-partisan efforts, like the Senate Smart Growth Task Force, founded to provide the federal government with tools to help communities deal with growth management issues.

More importantly, as the state's longest serving senator, he's got clout. Whether we like it or not, that counts in Washington. And therein lies the crux of this battle.

Levin will get the Big Bucks, he'll get the Big Backers. The Democratic Party will go out of its way to make sure he keeps his seat.

If Raczowski earns the Republican nomination, he will have party support as well. But he's got just 10 months to get the kind of voter recognition that could challenge what Levin has established in 24 years.

In announcing his bid, Raczowski proposed establishing "American First," a federal program that would funnel dollars into deteriorating infrastructure throughout the nation. Each state would get its fair share, and communities would get the help they need to repair or replace ancient sewer lines whose deterioration often results in flooded basements.

It's a great idea, but one that raises a few questions. How will American First be funded? How will states be held accountable to use the money for its intended purpose? We'll look for answers in the agenda Raczowski promises to roll out in the coming months – along with his ideas about prescription drugs, Social Security, Medicare and other problems he says politicians can readily identify in election years, but can't resolve once they've been elected.

Raczowski has the right idea. Every lawmaker who represents this state in Washington, D.C., should put Michigan first. Senior citizens shouldn't have to choose between paying the rent and paying for their prescription drugs.

We can't wait to see his solutions to those problems, and we look forward to a campaign he says will be issues-oriented.

One thing is certain. If this race was simply a matter of volume, energy, drive, belief and sheerchutzpah, Rocky would win hands down.

Devil is in the details of State of State ideas

It was House minority leader Buzz Thomas (D-Troy) who said it best, summarizing the reaction of the majority of state lawmakers on both sides of the political aisle to Gov. John Engler's State of the State address.

"The devil's in the details," Gov. Engler's speech did not include a lot of them. Despite the fact he unveiled a long list of proposals that sound good in principle, Republican and Democrat alike said they would have to see more of the fine print before they could tell for sure what position they would eventually take on each proposition.

In general, the themes sounded by Engler were great. For example, he said the state must support the auto industry as it makes its way through a transition from gasoline-powered engines to hydrogen-powered fuel cells. To make the change, car makers will need a "new generation of engineers," a new generation of plants, a new generation of workers. That means Michigan's auto industry has to undergo almost a complete "transformation."

Among the issues that need to be addressed, Engler said, would be taxes, regulations, new infrastructure, intellectual property, and research and development.

No one at the state level has expressed a disagreement with these points overall. Autos are critical to Michigan. And there is no guarantee that a fuel cell-based industry will end up centered here in this state, so it makes sense for the state government to do everything it can to keep Michigan on the cutting edge of the auto world.

Given that, there remains a lot of room for disagreement about exactly how the transformation should be made and what kind of state support should be included. What we can guarantee is that when Engler unveils his plan 60 days from now, there will be a lot of debate to be had. How much support should we give? What should it include? What is the industry willing to promise in return? If we are willing to do all this for autos, what are we willing to do for other industries important to Michigan?

Engler also called for a "down payment in next year's budget" to attract the construction of a Rare Isotope Accelerator at Michigan State University. Sen. Thaddeus McCotter (R-Livonia) had the best

answer to that proposal. "We cannot forsake the future for the immediate budget cuts," he said. "Ten years later we don't want to be saying that we tossed that out because of one year of tight budgets."

But there are lots of questions here too. How much of a down payment? What exactly would that money be used to pay for in order to make the federal money likely to place that nuclear research facility here?

And how do we get that out of a budget already \$900 million in the red? What else has to fall by the wayside?

Engler proposed getting a waiver from the federal government on Medicaid so the state can create a Mi-Family health insurance plan. He said it would spread benefits to another 200,000 Michigan residents. Again, the idea is great. How?

The governor proposed bringing Michigan into compliance with the "No Child Left Behind Act" recently signed by President George W. Bush. Again, that's great. We can all support better education and a commitment to give each student our best effort.

But the new federal act duplicates much of what is already in place here in Michigan, achievement testing in grades 3 to 8, for instance. So again the question is, how will it be done?

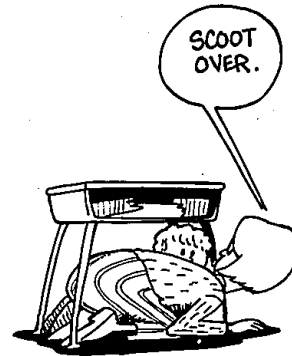
Engler called for a restructuring of Blue Cross, saying the company has to be kept solvent. Yes, indeed, it does. But how remains the looming issue.

Of course, Engler deserves credit. Another lame duck governor, scheduled to leave after 12 years in office due to term limits, might have been tempted to tout his legacy and leave it at that. Engler did indeed talk about what he believes he's accomplished in that time.

But he did not rest on his laurels. Engler made it clear he believes there is work yet to be done. And much of what he outlined can't possibly come to fruition until well after he is gone.

At best, the governor's final State of the State laid out for Michigan lawmakers and residents what the issues will be this year, and for several years to come. What the agenda should be, even if specific solutions are in short supply.

Finding the answers will have to be left to the rest of us.



LETTERS

■ Go to bed sooner

Several arguments pro and con have appeared relative to changing the starting time of our school children.

The only argument which hasn't been made is that if the children went to bed an hour or so earlier, the net effect would be the same as getting up an hour later!

Of course, that would require some discipline and the assumption of some responsibility on the part of all concerned, but it would be very, very cost effective.

There is some law or other which states that activities fill whatever time we allow them to, so if we cut down on activities of dubious value, such as TV watching or cruising down Orchard Lake Road late into the night, we could very easily get in enough sleep to be alert the next morning for class.

This may be a novel approach, and maybe there are a few who could not do this, but it is surely worth discussing seriously.

This would spare the taxpayers the burden of another tax hike to justify a later starting time schedule. I, for one, would vote against a tax hike, in any disguise, for this purpose, especially when we claim to be in a deficit mode already.

Henry Grysh
Farmington Hills

■ Grades and sleep

I write regarding two matters being reported in the Observer regarding the Farmington public schools – the proposed new accreditation system to give schools letter grades and the consideration of later start times based on adolescent sleep time research.

Cited in one article was "some" research that indicates teens don't get enough sleep because "they go to bed too late and then get up too early to catch buses for classes".

Perhaps I've missed something in the translation but this kind of finding leads me to think we're allowing science to replace common sense. How about we encourage students to get to bed earlier and save ourselves all the time and money devoted to this matter, not-to-mention the estimated hundreds of thousands it'll cost to implement later start times?

If later start times make sense for other reasons, let's hear them, but this rationale seems weak unless it's able to increase the length of our days so both overall schedules and sleep needs can be met.

As the sleep matter is considered, school district officials are expressing concerns about the Department of Education's proposed letter grade system for schools.

To them I say to not only bring on letter grades, but to give them all F's for wasting our time and tax dollars pondering over non-sleeping teens and later start times.

While we deliberate over sleep study research, let's also consider the findings of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study which found that of eighth grade students from 38 industrialized nations, the United States scored 18th in science and 19th in mathematics.

True, no grading system expresses all the factors comprising the grade. But what's good enough for our students should be good enough for our schools.

"Some" research suggests U.S. schools are napping on the job but I doubt later start times will prove our wake up call.

We should keep our time and money going toward basic education instead of wasting it to deliberate over unnecessary sleep research.

Glenn R. Trevisan
Farmington

■ Intelligent editorial

Hooray to you, Mr. Gallagher. Your editorial of Jan. 17 was just plain intelligent.

I recently retired from 30 years of teaching English. I wouldn't have given up teaching *Huck Finn*, no matter what anyone said.

And thanks for addressing the "Christian" element of our society who think little Harry Potter is evil. If they weren't so serious, they would be laughable.

Can we say *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Disney* in general? We have always loved our fantasy world. Anyone who hasn't met Bilbo Baggins is missing out on an ordinary character, who does extraordinary things, just as little Harry does.

Great traits for our children to learn, don't you think? Besides, when was the last time we saw children lined up for hours outside Borders, just waiting to see what will happen next to Harry? I love it!

Thank you, Mr. Gallagher. You made my day.

Carole Barker
Farmington Hills

■ Fuzzy math

Once again our keepers of taxpayer cash are playing fuzzy math games. Your headline article *District targets '03 time change* on Thursday, Jan. 10, 2002 quotes Mr. Tousey that the cost to start high school classes one hour earlier is \$644,985.72.

Now I admire Mr. Tousey's skill at figuring the cost right down to the penny, but he couldn't hit the facility cost any closer than \$250,000-\$500,000.

His figure for added buses is \$390,000. This added to the smallest amount for facilities, \$250,000 already puts the cost to \$640,000 without his drivers and mechanics.

Further, I see nothing in his estimates for maintenance, fuel/oil, garage utilities, etc. etc. Where did the \$644,985.72 come from? The bottom line with Mr. Tousey's figures, in my estimation, is a cost of over \$1,000,000 the first year. The ongoing cost would be less, but still significant. This in a time when we are already looking at a shortfall of \$5 million.

In this same article, I question Mr. Maxfield's sincerity in doing what is right for the students and the taxpayer when he said "my personal feeling is that this is the right thing to do" and "I want to do it." This tells me that no matter what recommendations are made by committee, it will be done one way or another.

Now comes the real problem. These are high school students and their parents. If they cannot assume the responsibility of making sure there is adequate sleep on school nights, they are failing their duty.

What makes anyone think that a later start time will change anything?

The student will just go to bed an hour later.

Why should we, the taxpayers, have to pay out even more tax money than we already do, to try and correct a problem of how a parent and student conduct their home life?

Kenneth Griffin
Farmington Hills

■ Headlines, lawsuits

Ford Motor Company seems to learn some things about its products only from headlines and lawsuits.

Their Customer Assistance refers problems to the dealer who was unable to answer them in the first place. Vehicle owners like myself with serious questions are turned away mad.

Ford gives computers to employees for their input, but buries ideas from customers that could indicate quality problems.

Polls taken when Concept models are displayed are less important than satisfaction with production vehicles. Answering technical questions would improve engineering and customer loyalty.

Erecting firewalls behind dealers leads to \$3 billion payouts and loss of confidence. NIH (Not Invented Here) is alive and well at Ford today, but the company is suffering.

Bank Borgman
Farmington

■ Hats off to Brickner

Based on your article on the discussion of a Dog Park Consortium (and hearing it live at COHA), I have to say hats off to Councilman Barry Brickner for following up on potential solutions.

A great deal of conversation was generated last year on possible park solutions and this sounds like a compromise proposal which could generate community benefit to many.

I think that municipalities sharing resources shows judicial insight into problems.

John Young
Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your 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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