

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

House candidates urged to take high ground

Politics are, like God's infinite mercy, a last resort. — F.J. O'Rourke

We always expect our editorial pages to sizzle a little bit during election season. But what's been happening over the past few weeks has left us wondering whether the state of political rhetoric in Farmington and Farmington Hills is headed toward some kind of super-nova.

There's nothing wrong with strident arguments. We appreciate vigorous, issue-oriented debate. We respect the right of every citizen to free speech, so we edit sparingly and try to publish as many letters as we can, space allowing. We also encourage people to be responsible in exercising free speech.

So it's probably time for us to say this again: C'mon, folks, let's be civil.

In the Republican primary for the House District 37 seat, we have three candidates, each of whom is well known in the community. When the Farmington Area Republican Club announced its endorsement of Valerie Knol, we weren't surprised. Knol is active in the club, which has been quite clear that it intends to endorse people who best represent members' interests.

Isn't that the point of a partisan endorsement?

Candidate Terry Sever participated in the process, even though he probably knew he wasn't going to get the club's nod. Candidate John Akouri chose not to, because he had concerns over the potential biases that he felt weren't addressed.

When Knol's endorsement was announced, Akouri supporters blasted FARC for what they believed was a rigged process. They claimed certain facts that we now have reason to believe weren't true, such as the number of club members pres-

ent for the interviews (10, not five) and whether Knol recused herself from the endorsement process (she was out of the building while the voting went on).

Reasonable people can disagree. But this battle is clearly becoming something other than reasonable. It's getting ugly.

Though on the same side, Akouri and Knol are clearly political enemies. We hope that's not news to anybody. Sever, if he's smart, will just stand back and watch what happens. That's how Jesse Ventura went from being a professional wrestler and talk show host to governor of Minnesota.

Well, pretty much.

The point is, this kind of campaigning only divides. And that's not what our communities really need.

Farmington and Farmington Hills need public officials who can work in harmony even with their most ardent political opponents, who can set aside personal differences and treat one another with respect. Our cities deserve representation from people who can focus their attention on the issues, rather than who did what to whom and why.

It doesn't matter, really, who wins which endorsements. There are almost 100,000 people in this political district and not one political organization or lobbying group represents even a majority.

What matters is the face that greets you at your door, the person who introduces himself or herself and says, "I want to represent you, and here's what I believe." What matters is how those candidates and the people on their side present themselves publicly, in the news media and on the street. We hope that voters pay close attention to those things.

And that the candidates do as well.

Parents, students should come clean about party

As Farmington Hills police continue their investigation into a house party gone very wrong, disturbing information has come to light not only about what was, but what might have been.

Not widely publicized is the fact that a young girl was locked in a bedroom upstairs when a small group of kids trashed and set fire to the lower level of the Trillium Drive home. Had no one found her, had the fire raged out of control, we'd have seen a tragedy far worse than the \$1 million loss of material goods.

Although that's certainly bad enough.

We understand that only a small group stayed behind and caused the damage. But almost 100 kids got drunk at this party.

Take time to reflect on our flag's meaning Friday

Our nation has come a long way from the simple beginnings of the U.S. Flag and Betsy Ross. It has become a national symbol of pride and a call to patriotic fervor, marked this week on Friday as a national holiday. And no where was that more evident than during those frantic days following our horrific national tragedy.

It was then that rescue workers, battling to save people from the Pentagon when the terrorists had planned a plane killing all in it, unfurled Old Glory over the edge of the building.

Once again, there was nothing old about our flag.

Call it nationalism, if you will. But the events of Sept. 11, 2001 did serve to call attention to that national symbol and what it represents, namely, that we are one nation and, together, we will defend our right to be a whole and sovereign nation.

Many of us may have known victims of the dive bomb crashes at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, or the plane crash in Pennsylvania. That, however, was no criterion for mourning the loss of those souls, the loss of an innocence born out of having what we once thought were secure borders.

Not since the memorable raising of our flag over Iwo Jima in World War II, have we been so moved, so determined. Now few of those who fought beyond our borders are left to remember.

That's what disturbs us most.

All those kids drunk to the point of impairment. They risked their lives without even knowing it, risked the possibility of losing consciousness when fire was set to the home.

Isn't that cause for concern in an affluent and educated community? Isn't that cause for concern in ANY community?

Somewhere along the line, something went terribly wrong. It's time for everyone to come forward, come clean and start talking about what's going on with our kids. It's time for parents to start asking tough questions about who their children are with and what they're doing.

If we wait longer or later, we'll be asking painful and difficult questions — like "Why here?"

Our flag, whether standing tall outside a building, or waving simply from the porch of a house, is a way to keep those memories alive in ANY community.

The way to help with that effort is to take a moment Friday to honor our flag, from Canton to Oxford, with a salute or just a pause to reflect.

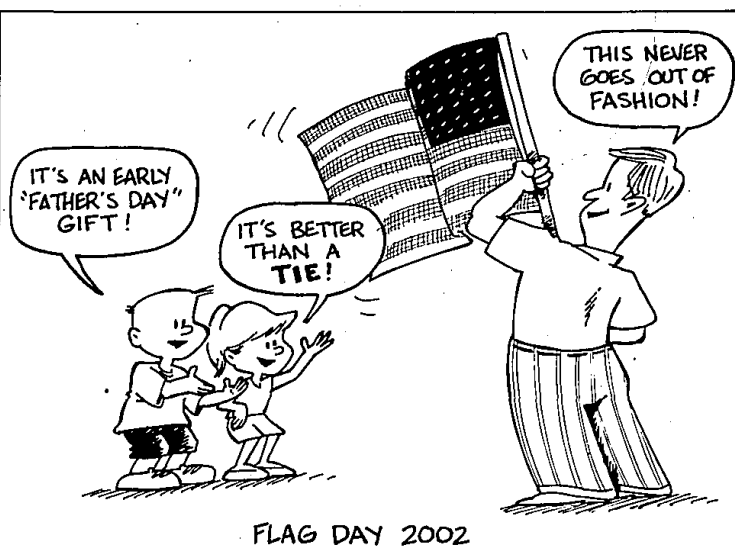
It is a tradition rooted in the 1800s. The idea of a day celebrating our flag can be traced back to 1866 in Fredonia, Wis., where a schoolteacher by the name of Wm. Cigrand had his students observe June 14 as the flag's birthday.

In 1914, Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane gave a Flag Day address. As a culmination to the groundswell of support, President Woodrow Wilson established Flag Day on May 30, 1916. But it wasn't until Aug. 3, 1949, that President Harry Truman designated June 14 as National Flag Day.

Started by children and their teacher, it is appropriate for today's children to reflect on the meaning behind the flag, and bring their lessons home to parents and siblings.

Some would have us do more. The National Flag Day Foundation hopes we'll all stop at 7 p.m. Friday for the 23rd annual pause for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

May we all be flag bearers in spirit, if not in reality. May we use our flag continue as the standard for the liberty and justice we so treasure.



LETTERS

■ Surprised by untruths

Imagine my surprise as I read your Guest Opinion last Thursday. I can excuse those signers who were not actually present at our meeting, but for the two board members who were present, there is no excuse for signing a document riddled with untruths.

For your benefit and that of the readers, let me present the facts. Our endorsement committee consists of 10 people, who present a recommendation to the Board of Directors, which consist of 24 people. The chair of the Endorsement Committee picks his/her members (the board and officers do not know who is on the committee) so that people are not unduly "pressured" by any one camp of supporters.

Ms. Knol was not present at the meetings, and I never commented on my support of her until after the decision by the Board had already been announced. I also abstained from the vote.

Perhaps the signers of the Guest Opinion are not aware that Mr. Akouri tried to influence the process and when he was not successful in doing so decided not to come before the committee for an interview. You cannot endorse someone who decided to sit it out.

Furthermore, I have personally been a part of many endorsement committees and I know of no organizations that "poll" their members. Not the UAW, MEA, the various Chambers I belong to or any other political organization. The committee and the Board of Directors of any organization is a representative sample of the group, just as we are a representative government.

Last, but not least, I personally met with Mr. Akouri three times last year to discuss his run for office. I am also the City Director for the Republican Party for Farmington Hills. One of my duties is to encourage people to run for elected office. In all of my conversations with Mr. Akouri, including one in late December of 2001, he claimed only to be interested in running for the State Senate.

I supported him in his bid for State Senate and recruited Valerie Knol to run for the State House because I believe she best represents the views of the people. In terms of early support and people knowing my views, then I guess that would have precluded Mr. Akouri from our endorsement as well, right? If every leader in this community who supports a candidate had to "recuse" themselves, not a lot would get done in an election season.

I have not in any way tried to influence the decision of the committee, but I certainly stand behind my full support of Valerie Knol.

**Linda M. Jolicoeur, President
Farmington Area Republican Club**

■ Setting record straight

After reading the letter that appeared in the Observer on Thursday, May 26, I am compelled to set the record straight on the incorrect information that appeared in the letter alluding to the action taken by the Farmington Area Republican Club. First, let me be clear that this letter is not an indictment on any of the candidates that are mentioned in the letter but is directed to the signers of that letter that appeared on the aforementioned date.

The true facts are as follows; the

endorsement committee invited all the Republican candidates for the State Representative office. Mr. Akouri was invited and after meeting with the Chairman of the Endorsement Committee, said he would get back to him after speaking with his committee. He never responded to the invitation to appear for an interview with the committee. The other two candidates did and were subsequently interviewed.

What troubles me the most is that two of the signers, Mr. Aon and Dr. Kalado who are members of the Executive Board and played a part in the endorsement procedure approved by the Board, would insist that Mr. Akouri would be given another opportunity to appear in spite of rejecting the first invitation.

This suggestion was not accepted since it would be unfair to the candidates that followed the procedure. It was clear that Mr. Akouri felt it unnecessary to attend this interview. Accusing the Farmington Area Republican Club of favoritism is not only inaccurate, but also unfair.

As for the charge of President Jolicoeur manipulating the vote, I take this as an insult to the integrity of the members of the club.

The last item I would like to clear up is that Ms. Knol took part in the vote on this endorsement. Wrong! She was not present when the vote was taken. She was notified to appear after the vote.

The signers of the letter are well known to me, and I find it out of character for them to lend their name to a document without getting all the facts. That action makes me wonder if they took the opportunity to fairly judge the action of the Farmington Area Republican Club.

I agree and support diverse opinions, however, I cannot abide with faulty information.

**Ben Marks, Board Member
Farmington Area Republican Club
Farmington Hills**

■ Akouri responds

Like all of you, I was deeply offended by the letter that appeared in last week's Observer that so vehemently attacked my character. In our town, we're accustomed to a different kind of political discourse. We don't deal in the currency of personal attacks and party politics. We talk about issues and experience, about plans for our cities, about honest representation, commitment and service.

I'd prefer to ignore that letter from last week, but I can't. I can't ignore it because my friends live here, because my mom and dad live in my neighborhood, because I attend church down the street on Saturdays. This is my home, and I will sit idly by while a stranger does his best to destroy the most valuable thing I own — my reputation.

You know me and you know the work that I have done for this community. I've taught classes at the Longacre House on Saturdays. This is my president. For ten years I hosted a television show on local cable, bringing our towns' issues into our family rooms. I worked for our community in Washington D.C. as Press Secretary for our Congressman, Joe Knollenberg.

I served on our Zoning Board of Appeals making tough decisions that affect our community. I volunteer my time for the Miss Farmington Scholarship competition and Leader Dogs for

the Blind.

I am not a liar, nor am I unaccomplished. I am committed to Farmington and Farmington Hills and refuse to allow our community to be represented by someone who does not know us at all or who would accept the support of a lowbrow character assassin.

This race or state representative is not about who can best curry favor with the party establishment. Our community does not want a representative who is more in tune with the Lansing elite than they are with folks living right here in town. Since the beginning of this campaign I have been talking about issues — about cutting taxes, finding ways to make prescription drugs more affordable, rebuilding our roads, strengthening our business community, making our schools more accountable and bringing common sense values back to our government.

These are not Democrat or Republican issues. I didn't get these ideas from political party chiefs in Lansing. I cultivated about them right here in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

I appreciate and thank my friends for standing behind me in this campaign and for voicing their support in a letter to the editor two weeks ago. In attacking me, the author of last week's letter also attacked these well-regarded community leaders.

I also thank my general election opponent Aldo Vagnozzi for calling me last week to express his disgust at that vicious and unfair letter. The author's radical voice does not represent the best of the Republican Party, but the worst.

In fact, he doesn't represent the party at all but spews his venom from the platform of a local club that is not even an arm or extension of the state or national party. He does not now nor ever will speak on behalf of my party.

The author and his candidate of choice don't know Farmington and Farmington Hills — if they did they would understand that we don't tolerate unfounded, distasteful attacks.

I invite all residents of Farmington and Farmington Hills to ensure that those kind of political tactics are roundly defeated on Aug. 6.

I also ask our cities' elected officials and administrators to join us in our campaign or consequently succumb to the realities of Jerry Springer-like representation in Lansing.

**John Akouri
Former Press Secretary to
Congressman Joe Knollenberg
and Candidate for the
Michigan House of
Representatives**

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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