

OUR VIEWS

Elected officials have rights, too

State Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) makes no bones about his anti-war feelings.

But should those sentiments be displayed on the door of his office at the State Capitol building?

Constituents who support military action in Iraq say no, and Vagnozzi, while under no legal obligation to do so, says he'll probably take it down now that the war has started.

Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) was among 11 state senators who opposed Senate Resolution 37, which backed troops but started out proclaiming support for President Bush's war strategy in Iraq. She supported Senate Resolution 38, which passed unanimously on the same day and only expressed support for our troops.

On Saturday, a number of elected officials are expected to participate in a "Support the Troops" rally held in Pontiac. Featured speakers like U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg have publicly supported the White House strategy in Iraq. "These are tough times in which to hold public office. Officials are elected to represent the interests of all their constituents; however, the war in Iraq does not have unanimous public support."

State Rep. Vagnozzi points out lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, in the Senate and House, were able to come together in support of U.S. servicemen and service-women, particularly those from Michigan.

To us, that's all that counts. There's a definite distinction between the person and the office, and we support the right of all elected officials to respectfully express their own personal beliefs — on their person or personal property.

After all, elected representatives are still citizens and haven't given up their First Amendment right to protest a war they feel is wrong.

However, when speaking as part of a legislative body, they must find a way to present a united front. When our nation's best and brightest put their lives on the line, when their families wait and pray, setting aside partisanship is the least elected officials can do.

We hope Vagnozzi takes his "No War" sign down at the Capitol, because his office represents all constituents. Better he displays a "Support Our Troops" banner, under which everyone can rally.

And we thank all our elected representatives for stepping forward to show, no matter what their politics might be, their hearts are in the right place.

Preserve Merit awards for needy students only

Families with students headed for college will get a double whammy if Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposed budget cuts for fiscal year 2004 are approved by the state Legislature.

Not only will they pay higher tuition, many could lose \$2,000 per child in Merit scholarships.

Granholm has proposed cutting funding to the state's 15 public universities and 29 community colleges by 6.7 percent. That's on top of the 12 percent in cuts over the past two years. Those institutions almost certainly will have to hike tuition once again to make up for that substantial loss of revenue.

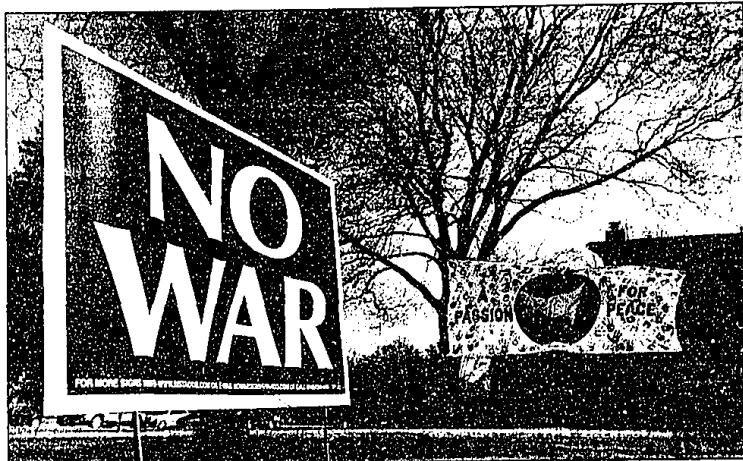
Granholm has also proposed slashing Merit scholarships from \$2,500 to \$500 beginning with 2004 high school graduates. Merit scholarships are awarded to college-bound students who score well in all four subject areas of the high school MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) test.

State Republican leaders have said they will challenge the governor's proposed cut in Merit scholarships, a three-year-old program funded with the state's share from the national tobacco settlement. Voters last November rejected a proposal to amend the state constitution to divert the money from Merit scholarships to health care.

For many students, \$2,000 can make the difference between going on to college or not. That amount would cover the cost of tuition for one year at a community college. Faced with the rising cost of tuition and the loss of an expected \$2,000 in Merit scholarships, some students may decide college is simply too expensive for them.

We propose that the Merit scholarship program be retained at the \$2,500 level, but that the qualifications be modified. Students would have to meet the current academic criteria but also show financial need for the money.

Such a compromise would reduce the amount of money the state spends on the Merit program. At the same time, it would give needy students the financial boost they need to continue their education.



The Servant Church of St. Alexander has a sign and a banner in front of the rectory made by the young people of the parish expressing their views on the war in Iraq.

Bill Bresler | Staff Photographer

LETTERS

Investigation needed

For those Farmington/Farmington Hills taxpayers that could not attend or watch the March 18 meeting of the Farmington Board of Education, allow me to recap the only substantive activity of the evening.

The board members authorized the redistribution of your income to families they select outside this district by deciding to participate in the Schools of Choice program.

Through their actions, the board sent a clear message to the taxpayers of this district: your feedback is irrelevant and unwanted. This observation is based on the fact that other than non-taxpayers and members of the committee recommending the participation, there is no support for this proposal.

Dozens of parents have appeared before this board and constructively explained their concerns with regard to this issue. In the face of this universal opposition, they wouldn't even consider delaying the vote, an accommodation they did make recently for Our Lady of Sorrows parents to whom they owe nothing.

What has become abundantly clear is that this board is unwilling to make the difficult long-term decisions necessary to address the issue of shrinking enrollment.

Closing facilities and reducing staff is not something that should be considered a last resort. By electing to take these baby steps toward this eventually, the board is risking its most precious resource, involved parents.

I would strongly suggest that an investigation take place to determine why parents are pulling their kids out of this school district. Could it be because the values of the residents are not represented on this board?

Robert Blair
Farmington Hills

Langan responds

I would like to set the record straight regarding the two stories that you ran in the Farmington Observer in February regarding my properties at the intersection of 14 Mile and Farmington Road.

I have been the tax paying property owner of that land since the late 1960s. I applied to the city for approval of a development for my property and was denied ANY use of my property. The city then refused to negotiate ANY price for my property. I even went so far as to attempt to coordinate a sale of the property, with the adjacent property owners and the city working together to purchase it, and that didn't work either.

My last recourse was to file a lawsuit. Without filing a lawsuit I would possess only the privilege of paying property taxes forever, nothing more.

Although the public is allowed into courtrooms, I don't think they are allowed to address the judge about their displeasure regarding how a case is going. That is what happens in council meetings, not a courtroom.

I believe that judges hold the law supreme, not land ownership. The law supports my right to use my property as a land owner, and a judge's mission is to uphold and enforce that law.

A judge cannot initiate a consent order...a consent order is an agreed upon settlement between two parties. The city, and not Judge (Alice) Gilbert, initiated the terms of this settlement.

Had the city come to me with any offer to purchase the property, the costs of litigation would have been avoided.

Furthermore, the city violated its own ordinance and allowed neighboring developments to be built without extending the utilities to the adjacent property line, my property. The city spent \$55,000 to extend the utilities properly.

I wonder what the total cost to the city has been, from appraisers, lawyers, engineers, consultants, planners, city staff time, sewer extension charges and other costs of litigating this matter. Compare that to the cost of purchasing the property in the first place.

J. Robert Langan
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Less is more

Recently there has been much discussion about the continuation and changes of the Farmington school district. No one wants to admit to the possible decline in enrollment.

On the other hand, some want to welcome students from other districts while others want to share our teachers with Our Lady of Sorrows. All this to raise more money for the district.

There are some on the school board who by their speech, actions and comments have given an attitude that our district is so much more graced with wealth and opportunity that we must welcome people from other districts and minorities into our district to place them in positions on the school board in an effort to extend our generosity and our blessings which is truly disguised as our superiority.

If the school district became a smaller business, would our youth really suffer? Many of us who grew up in less endowed circumstances have become educated. Becoming educated does not have to become an extravagance.

Perhaps it is the greed and personal importance of a few who want to share their superior bounty and make themselves more important by the size of their salaries who continue to advocate extending the horizons of the school board.

Our school district can demonstrate a more self efficient, more effective approach to its daily operations with a smaller budget and become a role model for the less endowed.

Sam Clark
Farmington Hills

Maxed out

Maxed out charge users don't want to change lifestyles they can't afford. College students ask parents, cities ask the state, and the states ask the federal government for increased funding.

Municipalities with living wage laws require suppliers to pay workers more, replacing customary low bid awards. Higher costs, opportunities to fiddle with contracts, and more unemployment result because few honest companies will pay high wages for unskilled workers.

Smaller class size does not guarantee better education but does require more

facilities and union members to teach the same number of students.

Police departments don't have enough officers on the street to prevent crime. Many patrolmen are assigned duties better performed by civilians, like taxi service and deskwork.

It is time to stop saying, "There is no place to cut." Maxed out citizens need tax relief.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

Peace starts at home

I disagree with your editorial saying that peace resolutions do not belong in the local community. What could be more local than a war which will ultimately have to be paid for in blood and treasure, by citizens in every town in the United States?

An offensive launched by the U.S. and the U.K. will kill hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Americans will also die. Will this bring democracy to Iraq? How could it? We are losing our own civil rights under the first Patriot Act rushed through Congress.

When I called Rep. Knollenberg's office to register my grave concern over a premeditated invasion of Iraq, I was told I was "misguided" and "misinformed." How is that for representative democracy?

The treasure of this country turned over to the military is obscene. We are treated daily to young soldiers eagerly anticipating action. What a sad commentary it is when a young soldier says she can hardly wait to "rock and roll."

No one probably told her that that Kuwait and Iraq are faced with deadly depleted uranium (DU). This fact alone will impact her health and that of her fellow soldiers. When the combatants return with mysterious ailments, the government will label it "stress" and fail to do anything, as happened during the first Gulf War.

The world has finally awakened to the apocalypse we face when war is used to settle political differences. Americans also oppose this "war" in huge numbers. Despite a media campaign against us, we are saying that, unless we nurture a sense of humanity and caring among our citizens, our own survival will be an open question.

Mary Johnston
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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QUOTABLE

"This is really about support for our troops. That's why we are there, so the people here can still have the right to protest."

— Rev. Brian Brewer, whose son Chad is fighting in Iraq

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