

OUR VIEWS

Don't forget local volunteers

What will you remember this Memorial Day? There's so much to consider, from the soldiers who have fought and died in Operation Iraqi Freedom to the still tender wounds inflicted by terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001. Some of us will celebrate the coalition's success in bringing down the regime of Saddam Hussein, while others express doubt as to the extent of that success.

Many will remember our nation's losses, our best and brightest who have given their lives so Iraqi citizens may live free from tyranny. Others will wonder at the new tyranny in our own land, laws giving government an ever-greater reach into our lives, all in the name of rooting out terrorist activity.

In some homes, families of servicemen and women wait and pray for word from their loved ones. They, too, serve and sacrifice.

This Memorial Day, it will be easy to remember what's wrong in our world. The economy's not recovering, the jobless rate steadily climbs, money is a constant battle theme at all levels of government — while at home, more families do without insurance and turn to food shelves to help make ends meet.

It will be even easier to forget, despite all the challenges we face, America is still the strongest nation in the world. We enjoy a higher standard of living and more freedoms than citizens in most other countries.

Locally, a stalwart group of service veterans who know the true meaning of sacrifice will once again host a Memorial Day parade and ceremony. The men and women of the Groves Walker American Legion Post, Farmington and Northwest Post in Farmington Hills work hard to honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, as well as all the men and women who bravely serve each day, putting their lives on the line in places far from home.

The local volunteers who devote countless hours to this endeavor serve as our collective conscience, reminding us all to pay tribute to those who have given so much so that we can live in relative peace and safety.

This Memorial Day at 10 a.m. in downtown Farmington, they will help us remember what really matters. Please don't forget them.

Helmet law repeal is a real no-brainer

The more we've learned about a House bill designed to repeal Michigan's motorcycle helmet law, the more we wonder why any lawmaker would vote for HB 4325.

Start with simple common sense: Any 6-year-old bicycle rider knows it makes sense to wear a helmet when you're on two wheels. We've even lobbied to have parents protect their children's heads with helmets while sledding, after a 9-year-old Livonia boy was killed during a YMCA camping trip.

Lots of grown-ups support motorcycle helmet laws as well. The list of organizations includes emergency room physicians, nurses, The Epilepsy Foundation, the Brain Injury Association, insurance carriers and even the Motorcycle Industry Council.

Why? Because countless credible studies show helmets prevent serious head injuries.

According to a U.S. Department of Transportation study, motorcycle crash-related injuries and fatalities increased in Kentucky and Louisiana after those two states weakened their helmet laws. Officials in California repealed their helmet law, then reinstated it after seeing the carnage on their roads.

Motorcyclists who oppose helmet laws argue a state mandate infringes on their personal liberties. Riders claim helmets interfere with their vision and ability to hear on the road.

However, a 1994 study by the National Highway Safety Administration showed wearing a helmet does not restrict the likelihood of seeing a vehicle in an adjacent lane, nor does it interfere with the driver's ability to hear signals.

A motorcyclist who pays attention to traffic, who drives defensively on the road, could almost certainly overcome whatever inconveniences a helmet might cause.

A motorcyclist who goes flying and smacks his head on the pavement can't do anything to replace the protection a helmet offers.

In fact, according to AAA Michigan, helmets have saved the lives of 800 motorcyclists over the past 13 years. In a recent survey asking Michigan residents whether motorcyclists should be required to wear helmets, three-quarters of respondents said "yes."

That's why lawmakers should say "no" to HB 4325. As far as we're concerned, this one's a real no-brainer.



These more than 40 young people honored last week by Farmington Youth Assistance and Akebono Corp. contributed as many hours as five full-time employees, at a value of more than \$150,000. We applaud their efforts, as well as the contribution of Akebono toward the success of these future leaders.

LETTERS

Deserving

I was pleased to see Dan Potter recognized as Officer of the Year for the city of Farmington.

A little sidelight on Dan: Some 18 years ago when Dan and his wife Brenda were expecting their daughter Jessica, the staff of the 47th District Court, where I was then judge, held a baby shower for Dan Potter.

Dan was serving in the detective bureau at that time as well as well regarded by the court clerks and other staff, as well as the judges, that they decided to give a baby shower in his honor for the baby Dan and his wife Brenda so much wanted and for whom they had so long waited. It was the only shower ever given by the court for a police officer, I believe.

Margaret G. Schaeffer
District Judge, retired
Farmington Hills

Seeds of change

Recently, representatives from Oakland County recommended the pavilion project and the \$1.7 million parking lot project be put on hold until a master plan is created to address the entire downtown.

Even though the planned site for the pavilion may not be the best location once a plan is developed, The Farmington Downtown Development Authority decided to proceed with the pavilion anyway. In a May 11 Farmington Observer article, the DDA gave no support for the decision other than an unrealized fear that some donors may back out if there was a delay. At the time, the DDA had not heard from the donors nor did they contact them.

Many volunteers have worked tirelessly planning and fund-raising for the pavilion and are excited to see the result of their hard work. However, the project shouldn't go forward just because it was scheduled at this time. I suggest the DDA and the City reconsider this decision due to the recent advice from Main Street.

I also suggest The City examine the timing of the \$1.7 million downtown center parking lot redesign project scheduled in 2003/2004. This should also wait until a plan is developed for downtown as a whole.

If the city council chooses to go ahead with these projects, against the advice of Main Street, a tremendous amount of leverage will be lost with Kinco - owner of most of the retail stores - when it comes to a master plan for our downtown.

The City of Farmington must change the way it thinks and responds for this program to flourish. This is an opportunity to show the residents how much The City values its participation in Main Street by pausing to think about the big picture.

I have seen the seeds of change and am hopeful.

Scott Freeman
Farmington

Living wall

It is a welcome action by our mayor and council embracing the living wall concept to control noise pollution from

interstate highways. I-696 is 20 percent over federal noise standards. It is time that the State live up to these standards.

Richard F. Conlin
Farmington Hills

Bad bill

A new bill reported out of the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 1, threatens to gut local bus transportation by severely cutting state funding to both SMART and D-DOT. Under Senate Bill 265 (the MDOT budget bill), SMART and D-DOT would lose \$11 million combined, while most other public transit agencies in Michigan would be given increases averaging half of 1 percent.

Worse yet, Sen. Shirley Johnson of Royal Oak justified the cut to SMART in part because local residents voted to raise an additional \$23 million annually for SMART through the local SMART millage. Senator Johnson asserted that SMART therefore no longer needs its share of the \$11 million in State funds she would take away from it and D-DOT.

That is dead wrong. We taxpayers, of course, were voting not to take on the State's funding burden for ourselves, but simply to supplement State funds with our taxes.

Reducing State support for SMART and D-DOT is an outrage to the people of Southeast Michigan, who voted to pay more taxes to improve our public transit systems. As Sen. Mickey Switalski and others stated, it's like an employee who decides to put more money into his 401(k) retirement plan, only to have his employer remove the same amount in employer contributions.

Indeed, with so much of SMART and D-DOT's funding being transferred to outstate transit systems, it's more like the employer moving its contribution from the employee's account to that of a competing employer.

Senate Bill 265 is a fraud on the taxpayers of Southeast Michigan. We're paying our fair share for public transit in the region. The State should continue to do so, too.

I. Mark Steckloff
Farmington Hills

Hear students

I am a student at Oakland Community College. For the past two months, students have been attending meetings of the Board of Trustees to protest what we feel is the unfair employment termination of Carol Thomas King, Professor of Theater.

At both meetings, student expression has been limited. At last month's meeting, only four students out of 40 were allowed to address the trustees. Each of those four students were limited to two minutes speaking time.

While I understand that the trustees have the right to limit discussion, by limiting it in this manner, they are not allowing for fair discussion of the students' concerns. In as much, the Trustees at Oakland Community College are denying the First Amendment rights of students to speak within what would be considered an appropriate forum for our concerns.

We wish to speak and be listened to. We simply want our concerns to be heard...and hopefully addressed within the proper forum for such concerns.

Michelle L. Landry
Royal Oak

Another war?

While we were all watching the liberation of Iraq, the Granholm Administration and her supporters have been waging a tax war on the citizens and small business owners of Michigan.

In an attempt to balance the 2004 budget, the Administration is recommending 14 "loopholes" be amended. Many of the proposals would raise taxes on job providers, mostly small businesses, expand the Real Estate Tax (which would increase the cost of purchasing a home), increase taxes on gas and oil, (just when prices are finally starting to drop), and reestablishing excessive tax penalties on taxpayers who make inadvertent mistakes when filing their taxes (50 percent penalties higher than any other state).

Small businesses are the seed of big businesses. We are already losing too many jobs to overseas companies and those in the South and Western states. Are we trying to show the rest of the businesses in Michigan the door?

Over the past decade Michigan has finally placed its tax levels in the medium range by cutting taxes, and in some cases winning court decisions that enforce fairness. (The US Supreme Court has deemed two of the proposed tax measures unconstitutional). Now the Administration and its supporters want to put Michigan back in the 80s by increasing taxes before they have cut spending.

It is true no one could foresee the evils of Sept. 11 and what affects it would have on our economy, and I am not blaming anyone. All I am asking is that the Administration cut all areas of the budget equally before coming to the taxpayers and businesses of Michigan. That includes cutting the waste in K-12 education, which has not been touched. I sure hope that has nothing to do with all that money the MEA contributed to you know whom.

Linda Jellison
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

"Working with Special Olympics is so rewarding, I often feel I'm indebted to them for letting me be a part of it."

— David Cattermole, Oakland County Special Olympics volunteer of the year

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