

# Opinion

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## Special ed

### Farmington has a stake!

**Y**OU'D HAVE to look hard to detect that there's a special election next Monday, Oct. 7, in the Oakland Intermediate School District.

The people backing special education are working quietly — almost too quietly — to arouse voters friendly to education without stirring up the "anti" vote.

Taxpayers in local districts served by the Oakland Intermediate School District — Farmington and Clarenceville included — currently pay one mill of property tax (\$1 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation) for special education — 50 cents voted in 1954 and another 50 cents voted in 1965.

Monday's proposal would increase the levy three-quarters of a mill, or 75 cents per \$1,000 of SEV. If your house has a market value of \$80,000 and is assessed for \$40,000, your bill would rise \$30 a year. (Actually, half of us would pay less than that because of rebates on our state income taxes.)

THE OCT. 7 proposal is a hefty increase. But we see it as a community necessity and endorse it.

Some 20,000 kids in the Oakland Intermediate area benefit from special ed. They run the gamut from the trainable mentally impaired to the physically handicapped, from the autistic (an emotional handicap) to the severely mentally impaired, from the hearing impaired to the multiply impaired, and so on.

The state says we, as a community, must educate them. It's not a matter of throwing them around or locking them up in an institution. There is a law. It is a community responsibility. We ought to face up to that.

Besides, it's a good law. Modern medicine is saving more and more babies who used to die at birth. Kids who used to be vaguely known as "problems" are being scientifically diagnosed and helped. Many can be helped to lead productive lives.

THE TENS of thousands of youngsters who don't need special ed also will benefit from this millage, strange as that may seem.

The sad fact is that some school districts must dip into their general funds to supplement special education funding from the state and intermediate district.

If next Monday's three-quarters of a mill is passed, the Oakland Intermediate district will have \$10.5 million of new revenue to ease the burden on those local districts. That frees up local district dollars to educate the other kids.

Of those 20,000 youngsters in special ed, 2,000 are trained in so-called "center" programs, operated by 15 local districts under contract with the Oakland Intermediate District. The other 18,000 are "mainstreamed" — taught in regular classrooms, but given additional special instruction.

The point is that the money doesn't go to a bottomless bureaucratic pit in Pontiac. Local teachers on local payrolls in our home towns are doing the work.

WHILE THE state has been forceful and warm-hearted about mandating special ed, it has been less than free with the money to finance it.

Four times in the recent recession, Lansing cut special ed funds. The state's contribution to special ed in Oakland districts has dropped from 46 percent in 1976 to 30 percent in 1983 (the last year for which figures are available). That's a cut of more than one-third.

Meanwhile, as the proportion of kids requiring special ed has risen faster than the population, the 1978 (Headlee) Tax Limitation Amendment to the Michigan Constitution sees to it that revenue from existing sources can't rise faster than inflation.

The responsible course, as we see it, is to approve next Monday's ballot proposal.

— Observer & Eccentric Newspapers



## Can Rouge be reclaimed?

THE STATE Water Resources Commission this week paid a visit to the Rouge River, "the dirtiest river in Michigan and perhaps the dirtiest in the Great Lakes Region," in the tough words of WRC Chairman James E. Murray.

Murray, who makes his living as drain commissioner of nearby Washtenaw County and so has some appreciation of rivers, talks of a united effort to reclaim the Rouge, which drains all 12 of the Observer & Eccentric area communities, and then some.

Lots of luck, Jim.

THE ROUGE always has been dirty, at least since I can first remember it in World War II days before suburbs were built.

It's common for a river like the Rouge to be muddy. Look at the Cass River up in the Thumb area. The land rimming Saginaw Bay, like the land of southeastern Michigan, is very flat because of glacial action 12,000 or more years ago.

Even if there were no such thing as pollution, the Rouge would run muddy. No river running across flat land is a clear, babbling brook.

IN THE 1920s, the Middle Rouge in western Wayne County was dammed in at least four spots to form ponds and lakes. The dams were supposed to have generated hydroelectric power for Henry Ford's



Tim Richard

small-town auto plants.

Those ponds began dying as soon as they were created because they are so shallow. Biologists call the process eutrophication. Sediment fills them in. Weeds die and pile up, fertilizing more weeds.

Two-thirds of Waterford Pond in Northville Township, part of Phoenix and Wilcox lakes in Plymouth and at least half of Newburgh Lake in Livonia have weeds above the water surface. A rotten algae, as slimy as wet bathroom tissue, floats on the surface.

WHAT MAKES the Rouge even worse than the Cass, or Great Plains rivers like the Platte, is pollution.

WRC Chairman Murray counts 180 combined sewer overflow (CSO) points on the Rouge's four branches. CSOs are combined stormwater and sanitary sewer lines.

When they overflow — which is easy during a storm on flat terrain — the mixture of storm water and sewage runs into the Rouge. In some spots you can smell human waste.

There are other sources of pollution. Salt and oil from our roads — to which environmentalists have given the snazzy term of "non-point pollution" — degrade the water chemically.

A Plymouth Township lady of my acquaintance used to spot oil spills on the Middle Rouge. She would call the WRC and raise hell. Her chief suspect was a nearby auto dealer's garage.

I don't know if anybody ever proved anything, because the WRC inspector wouldn't talk to a newspaper or any newspaper. I complained about him to Lansing and received an insulting letter in reply.

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE for the Rouge's water quality?

The buck starts with the state WRC. The Rouge's branches flow through parts of Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties. Some 38 cities, townships and villages stretch along the Rouge's banks. And because the Rouge flows into the Detroit River, a Great Lakes connecting water, perhaps the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has a share of the responsibility.

Reclaiming the Rouge, at least from pollution and chemical contamination, will be an enormous job with an enormous price tag. Even if the 41 units of government at the federal, state and local levels do it, the Rouge will still run brown.

## Keep watch

### Don't make it easy for thieves

**N**EVER GIVE A Burglar A Break. That's the theme of the National Neighborhood Watch program.

Sanctioned by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the program is a proven success in teaching residents how to reduce the threat of burglary both to their property and that of their neighbors. Burglars typically take such readily disposal goods as guns, televisions, stereos and cash as well as such higher-priced items as gold and silver.

In 1982-83, residential break-ins had increased in Farmington Hills, not dramatically, but enough to trigger local concern. But by 1983-84 — the third year of the neighborhood watch program in the city — residential B&Es were down 8.8 percent. In 1984-85, they were down a whopping 18.8 percent.

In Farmington, 104 residential B&Es were reported in 1983, the year before the program was introduced. The next year, the number had fallen by 20 percent. "We're projecting an even better percentage drop this year," said Department of Public Safety Commander Charles Lee, one of the program's most enthusiastic proponents.

WHAT'S THE role of watchpersons? To look for potentially suspicious activity in their neighborhood.

When they suspect a criminal offense, watchpersons jot down all pertinent information, then immediately call the police. They don't do any investigating or attempt to make any arrests themselves.

Farmington Hills Police Lt. Richard Murphy argues persuasively in favor of passive watchpersons rather than resident patrols. His intent to help protect well-intentioned watchpersons from becoming unwitting victims or suspects themselves. Murphy prefers that watchpersons act only as supplemental "eyes and ears" for the officers who regularly patrol neighborhoods.

For example, while walking either near windows in their homes, through their yards or to their mailboxes, watchpersons can routinely keep watch for potential trouble in their neighborhood. As Murphy



National Neighborhood Watch logo.

put it: "We encourage people to report what they see. We discourage them to take any type of action."

LEE STRESSED that the "program can only be as effective as the people on any given block allow it to be. They really have to get into it. They have to be nosy. They have to be suspicious. And they have to call us."

Added Murphy: "Residents know who belongs where, and what car belongs where. They know their neighborhood far better than we do. And we try to capitalize on that."

Murphy emphasized that watchpersons aren't deputized and are liable for their actions, so they shouldn't take the law into their own hands and possibly set themselves up for prosecution.

Program participants are told exactly what they can or cannot do and what they can or cannot expect from the police department. They also receive a home security survey, a neighborhood watch sign and periodic feedback.

The key to the program's success lies in watchpersons not trying to vigilante, but instead trying to be their neighbors' keeper through familiarity with their habits.

THE PROGRAM alone won't rid your neighborhood of burglaries. But it can help limit the volume and help lessen your family's fear of them.

It also might help spark new or strengthen existing friendships within your neighborhood. As Murphy put it: "It gets people within the community talking to one another — and that can't help but have a positive effect."

— Bob Sklar

## Can the ruler see his clothes?

ONCE UPON a time there was a nation where almost everyone was well fed and had nice places to live. The inhabitants often were told that they were among the richest people in the world — in fact, among the richest people who had ever lived.

An earlier ruler of the country had promised that each family would have a chicken for every pot. That ruler had long since died, and the people were even wealthier than that.

Besides a chicken for every pot, there was a personal travel vehicle and a television set for almost every member of each family and an expectation that every family should have a device to make video-tape recordings of the television programs they watched.

Rulers of the country did not descend from a long line of royalty but were ordained by the people. Rulers came from such humble beginnings as lemon farms and peanut farms and before becoming rulers held such positions as high school teacher, sports announcer and movie actor.

THE RULER at the time we are talking about was a former sports announcer and movie actor. The people revered their ruler for his direct ways and his seeming ability to ensure that most families had a television in every room and a device to make recordings of these programs, as well as the money to buy other goods for



Bob Wisler

the pursuit of happiness.

Alas, the people loved their ruler so much that they could not bear to see, as time passed, that he was being weighed down by a golden cape which grew bigger and bigger every year. The cape somehow was created by an ancient spell, which said that as the richest nation on earth borrowed from the future and went into debt, the cape would become longer and heavier.

THE RULER had always believed that it did not matter how much the nation borrowed from the future. He believed that somehow the total wealth of the nation would grow each year so that at no point would anyone have to pay the debt.

What was important, the ruler used to say, was that he make sure the people's grandchildren didn't get blown up or destroyed in a war. No one suggested that ruler for his direct ways and his seeming ability to ensure that most families had a television in every room and a device to make recordings of these programs, as well as the money to buy other goods for

that the debt and cape were growing and that the ruler was becoming weighed down by its bulk. They pretended not to notice. And as the years went on, the ancient spell began working another magic — the people themselves became weighed with golden capes of future debt.

STILL THE people pretended not to notice and continued to talk among themselves about what goods were necessary for the pursuit of happiness.

Then one day a boy named Stockman said something that no one had dared say before. He said that the nation's future debt was such that the country was in peril, and he pointed out the growing golden capes weighing down the president — and everyone else, for that matter.

Stockman had at one time been in the ruler's court where he had spoken out. At that time, the ruler had taken him to the royal woodshed and lectured him on the necessity of being quiet.

So the people of the nation didn't trust Stockman, and they listened to their ruler who said there was no growing cape. As time went on, the people of the nation were so weighed down by their capes that they couldn't move, and all commerce stopped.

And that is how the richest nation on earth became very poor and how for many years there was no money.