

Opinion

33203 Grand River / Farmington, MI 48024 Bob Sklar editor / 477-5450

144(F) O&E Thursday, May 11, 1989

School tax rate

Roll-up is wiser than override

THEY MADE the right decision — at least early signs point to that.

Farmington school trustees could have tried to override the Tax Limitation Amendment and levy the full 37.29 mills authorized by voters. That no doubt would've infuriated most taxpayers.

Instead, trustees have chosen a wiser tack: rolling up the tax rate to the maximum allowed under Headlee in an effort to dent a growing list of badly needed building improvements.

The new tax rate, 35.39 mills, is 1.74 mills higher than last year — still roughly 20 percent less than the average among Oakland County's 23 school districts.

No doubt about it: Farmington Public Schools — boasting a state equalized value of \$2.1 billion and 1,000 employees — receives the major share of this community's tax bill.

School officials have unveiled a 1989-90 operating budget of \$85.5 million — up \$6 million from projected expenses this year.

HE'S NOT one to try to hoodwink the public. So when deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan, the district's money manager, says the new budget will provide "a quality education for a good tax rate," there's reason to listen.

The new budget bases salary increases on the current inflation rate of 4.1 percent, although collective bargaining could bring a higher percentage.

It calls for only one new staff member (a teacher on TV production aide) and only a 10-percent contingency fund (enough to cover 18 days of school).

The budget reflects a \$1.9 million increase in health insurance costs, a 31-percent rise.

Most significant, the budget will let the district do up to 25 percent of the \$17 1/2 million in building improvements still pending after last fall's defeat of a bond issue. Voters seemed to say, "Do the improvements, but with operating money."

THIS MARKS the district's first tax-rate boost in 10 years, thanks largely to a healthy tax

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base. Last year, the tax rate was rolled back 1.1 mills. Retiring debt will roll back the debt millage from 1.2 mills to 1 mill.

Far from all-encompassing, the budget doesn't yet take into account that Social Security reform likely will cost the district \$1 million in employer payments next year.

The budget doesn't address \$8 million in newly identified building improvements, the technology advisory committee's \$2.3 million plan to bring computers and other technology into the classroom and \$402,000 in landscaping needs — some of which could be built into the budget once it's decided how many previously identified building improvements will be done next year.

The budget also doesn't address school finance reform, which could emerge at any time — but which Farmington should be able to absorb through its contingency fund, Flanagan said.

We'll await public comment next Tuesday before passing final judgment on the budget. We applaud the district for releasing a detailed version before the school board held its budget work session.

Meanwhile, at a time when taxpayers are more apt to think revolt than support, we think a blue-ribbon advisory panel of district officials and residents should be called to scrutinize the budget.

Is the administration top-heavy? Can we afford all our enrichment offerings? What priority should be placed on new technology? Is creative programming possible to save money without sacrificing quality? Have frills gone undetected?

It's time for a definitive public look at the budget of our community's top taxing jurisdiction.

Bright lights

Academic All-Stars honored

OVER THE past few years, parents have been deluged with bad news about the educational system. From the federal government on down to the local school district, we have been plugged into this tale of gloom.

And it is true that improvements do have to be made. But every year through the Observer & Eccentric All-Star program, the principals of our local high schools sit down to pick this area's best and brightest.

The All-Stars are selected based on grade point average and national college test scores. The tabulation of scores and selection is done by a committee of area high school principals.

You will find in this edition a special insert highlighting the achievements of these students. In addition to being profiled in a special section, the students also receive a dictionary embossed with their name and a special certificate of recognition. This year, 16 students from Eccentric-area high schools are All-Stars. Twenty-nine others have been named runners-up.

These are youths who are more than just brilliant. They are achievers in many areas of life. And very likely they will be the leaders of tomorrow.

These are the students who prove that through discipline, determination and a lot of hard work, achievement is possible in every school district — no matter how funding is determined.

Teachers

They help mold young scholars

TEACHERS do matter, even for the high achievers who seem to excel no matter who is standing up front near the blackboard.

Doubters need only listen to some of the comments from our Academic All-Stars. When asked who provided the major influence for their academic careers, most put their parents and teachers at the top of the list.

"Each of my teachers has contributed in their own way," one Thurston High School senior wrote. "While some pushed me to further my knowledge with text books, others encouraged me to keep an open mind."

A TROY Athens senior planning on a career in medicine — who admitted he wasn't big on writ-

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We hope you join us in congratulating these students in their achievements and wish them luck in their college careers.

Here are the 1989 Eccentric All-Stars in order of ranking:

Michael K. Weiss of West Bloomfield High School, David H. Sohn of Detroit Country Day, Christopher S. Welser of Roper City and Country School, Kerry P. Hastings of Rochester Adams High School, Steven N. Kalkanis of Detroit Country Day, Rajesh Gutta of Troy Athens High School, Sean P. Kanuck of Andover High School, Dov N. Chelst of Akiva Hebrew Day School, Emily R. Hsu of Troy High School, Michael D. DuBay of Brother Rice High School, Peter Z. Taylor of Groves High School, Victoria H. Bookstein of Roper City and Country School, Travis L. Helm of Brother Rice High School, Holly J. Oh of Rochester High School, Scott D. Satterthwaite of Rochester Adams High School and Chelsea E. Kostrub of Troy High School.

ing — talked about an English teacher who showed him the importance of written communication in every profession.

A Livonia Franklin student said it was an athletic coach, strangely enough, who influenced him academically by teaching him to "strive for excellence" whatever the endeavor.

What this tells us is that no matter how we tinker with the educational process, the push to turn our young adults capable of dealing with the problems of the 21st century isn't going to get very far without a continuing cadre of bright, dedicated teachers to lead the way.

Also, with all the talk these days about the growing role of computers and other high-tech gadgetry in the classroom, it's nice to know that the human element still plays perhaps the most important part in shaping young minds.



Commitment needed to help inspire voters

DAVID HARON'S resignation from the Committee to Increase Voter Participation deserves more than a footnote in Farmington Hills' municipal diary.

His appointment as chairman in 1987 gave a strong voice to the then-newly activated advisory committee. It was his 1986 complaint that prompted the city council to adopt a liberal political lawn sign ordinance.

"Voting is a basic American right. As an attorney, I'm aware of what can happen if you don't exercise your rights," Haron told me after he accepted the chairmanship.

But within 18 months of that appointment, Haron abruptly stepped down. His resignation letter cites many reasons. But one in particular bothers me.

"It is obvious that the communication between the city council and our committee is non-existent and that the council's memory or intentions are different than ours," he wrote April 19.

Haron came to that conclusion after city officials decided to include two voter participation questions in a four-page resident attitude survey mailed to every home last week.

The staff-generated survey comes after the city council led Haron's committee to believe a multi-ques-



Bob Sklar

tion voter participation survey would be a significant part of a professionally done resident attitude survey.

THERE'S NO doubt in my mind that voter participation should be a municipal priority. Heck, there's nothing more basic to operating a city government than electing a city council.

But in the last two Farmington Hills City Council elections, only 14 percent of those registered to vote set aside the time to vote. Apathy in special city elections is even worse. In the two held in 1986, turnouts were less than 7 percent.

Besides improving voter participation and increasing election information, Haron wanted to make it easier to find polling places through use of "get out and vote" signs.

Make no mistake: Every vote counts in Farmington Hills elections.

Mayor Terry Sever won election to the city council by seven votes in 1985; the year before, he lost a bid for a seat by one vote.

I'm sure the Committee to Increase Voter Participation will do its darndest to build on Haron's determined bid to get people to spend a few minutes in the voting booth a few times a year.

BUT I'D urge the community to take a long look at Haron's disappointing step into the world of civic involvement.

Haron still thinks getting involved can make a difference, but only if "elected officials would stop being so confrontational and start communicating."

"Unfortunately," he says, "it appears that the voters who stay home may not be apathetic but may have made a conscious effort to express their similar disappointment."

Farmington Hills City Council members may think they're communicating. Often, they are.

But the audience too often witnesses grandstanding, which strips council members of their ability or desire to communicate — among themselves or to the public.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Wild animals just that: wild

To the editor: This is the time of year that lots of baby wild animals are born. Unfortunately, many people find these babies and try to raise them to be pets.

Wild animals are just that: wild. Some people say they can tame a wild animal, but it's not that the animal is tamed as much as it merely accommodates, to an extent, to captivity — and that is not fair to that wild animal.

If for some reason or another you find a wild baby animal, watch the baby for a few hours to see if the baby's mother will return and feed her baby. It is much better for the wild baby animal to be raised by its own mother.

If the mother does not return to the baby, you can step in and help. You can call the DNR for help, or you can raise the orphaned wild animal yourself.

Go to the library and get a book on the certain wild animal you have acquired and are going to nurse until the baby can be released back into the wild. Do not raise the wild baby to keep as a pet. This is not fair to the animal.

Yes, at first a baby animal is cuddly and very loving. But, you must remember that the baby or ba-

bies have natural instincts that will assert themselves.

They get frightened as any other animal or person and react to protect themselves. You cannot expect a wild baby animal to be like a puppy or kitten.

Please take care. Enjoy wild animals as they are wild and free.

Beverly D. Cornell, Farmington Hills

Violence did mar protests

To the editor: I was pleased with the Farmington Observer's news coverage (May 1) of the clinic protests in Farmington Hills.

Your editorial on May 4, stating that the real heroes were the police officers who kept both sides apart, was inaccurate.

All of the pro-choice demonstrators were "not primed for battle." They were members of the Metro Detroit Action for Choice who had been through training sessions and had signed pledges to be both non-confrontational and non-violent.

The police made no attempt to stop Joseph Scheidter, the Chicago leader of the Pro-Life Action League and author of a book showing 99 ways to shut down women's health clinics, from coming within six feet

of the national NOW president, Molly Yard, and me.

Shortly after, I was shoved aside by a woman who tore up my NOW sign and lunged toward Molly Yard, grabbed her sign and crumpled it.

Channel 7, on its April 9 six o'clock news, stated that there was violence and showed the whole episode.

I thank you for the thoughtful article by Casey Hans in the same edition (May 1).

Marian McCracken, Farmington

Be sure to write plainly

To the editor:

It seems reasonable that every citizen should be able to understand the obligations they incur with their leases, purchase agreements and insurance contracts.

Yet without passage of plain language legislation in this state, that privilege is reserved for members of the legal profession.

Plain language bills have been introduced in every legislative session since 1981, and have died each time in the state Senate.

Perhaps everyone should write their senator. Please write plainly.

Timothy Lachowski, Farmington Hills

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