

Opinion

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

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Double-dip Solution could cut unfair tax

IF ADMITTING a problem is the best way to begin attacking it, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners is well on its way to solving an unfair tax system that's long bothered many residents.

Why should folks in Farmington Hills, Farmington, Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Southfield or anywhere else pay for their own district courts and the district courts in Troy, Rochester and Walled Lake?

It's called double-dipping, or double-taxation. Taxpayers' local tax dollars go toward their local district court while their county tax dollars help keep the 52nd District Court operating.

That 52nd District Court, with divisions in Clarkston, Rochester, Troy and Walled Lake, serves its residents the same way local district courts like the 48th, 47th or 46th serve their residents, except that county tax money is there to keep the system afloat. This year, that means county taxpayers will pump in almost \$900,000 from county taxes.

That isn't fair.

OF COURSE, this isn't a new problem, but one that's been around more than 20 years.

It started out as a solution to another problem: How could outlying, rural communities support their own district courts? It's similar to the way the county sheriff's department initially stepped in to police rural communities.

Those rural towns and farmlands — Troy, Rochester and to a lesser extent Clarkston and Walled Lake — are now largely developed, thriving cities that can afford to pay for their own courts.

The county board of commissioners passed a resolution asking the state Legislature to allow the county to keep 90 cents of every dollar in local fines and tickets that comes in to pay for expenses.

Right now, the county can only keep about 66 cents, with the rest going back to the local community where the ticket was written. Under the new solution, just 10 cents would go back to the local community.

It's called double-dipping, or double-taxation. Taxpayers' local tax dollars go toward their local district court while their county tax dollars help keep the 52nd District Court operating. . . This year, that means county taxpayers will pump in almost \$900,000 from county taxes (to help fund the 52nd District Court).

This solution doesn't really solve the problem. That's the argument of county commissioners like John Pappageorge, R-Troy. He says the state should step up to its commitment and fund the district court system. He also realizes that making the system fairer will mean taking away money from his constituents in Troy.

NEARLY ALL commissioners agree the state could solve the double-dipping situation by taking over funding the courts.

"The problem is," says commissioner Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield, "the state has never indicated what it's going to do. This, at least, recognizes the inequity in Oakland County."

Commissioner Michael McCulloch, R-Royal Oak, calls the resolution he sponsored a "gap filler." And, it fills the gap nearly all the way.

If the county had been allowed to keep 90 percent of revenue this year, county taxpayers would only be paying about \$150,000 for the 52nd District system rather than six times that, which it will cost this year.

For all practical purposes, this 90 percent solution will make things more fair for those double-dipped county taxpayers.

After all, if it didn't cost the county anything to run 52nd District Court — if it were running break-even — nobody would complain.

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ment also have important roles to play.

If voters are to be sold on increased-state aid, each local district must put its own house in order, balancing program with maintenance.

More money can buy more hardware, it can renew buildings, but hardware and buildings are no guarantee of a good education.

A computer cannot benefit a child who cannot read its instruction manual.

Instead of comparing the number of computers in neighboring classrooms, we suggest districts compare the number of students who can spell properly.

And why are school districts with the highest per pupil revenues having problems maintaining buildings?

WHILE WE BELIEVE an increase in state aid is necessary, we believe local districts could work more closely with local government.

Rather than complaining about their lack of commercial tax base, we urge school officials to work with city and township planners to promote business growth within their mutual territory.

We also urge local officials to resist the temptation of commercial and industrial tax breaks, as well as tax increment financing authority districts, knowing that they rob school districts of precious tax revenue.

As we said before, when tax rates and average house sale prices were compared, it became abundantly clear that most local taxpayers are paying plenty to provide for quality schools. For every Clarkston, where voters just turned down a bond issue for new schools and a Hendee override, there is a West Bloomfield, where voters have approved a series of new funds.

With each property tax payment, local homeowners declare their commitment to quality education. It's time for our elected officials, both in Lansing and at the local level to do the same.

Lansing must declare its commitment not to reduce general fund money to education, should other tax proposals go through. And districts must demonstrate they are spending wisely.

THANKS



Right-to-die argument: a very personal matter

DAVID RIVLIN, paralyzed from the neck down, wants to die while he's still sane.

And he makes a compelling argument why he should have the right to do just that.

On May 17, the Farmington quadriplegic petitioned Oakland County Circuit Judge Hilda Gage to be removed from the ventilator that has kept him breathing for almost three years and to let nature take over.

"His one driving wish at this time is to have his existence terminated in as painless and swift a manner as may be possible," his petition reads.

The former Oak Park resident tried to make a go of it after severing his spinal cord in a California surfing accident 18 years ago. He tried to live independently. He tried to maintain his dignity. He went back to school. He flirted with marriage.

But a spinal aneurysm in 1986 left him bedridden — without use of his arms, on a ventilator and with no hope of recovery. The isolation has sapped his will to live.

Rivlin, 38, is bright, alert and articulate. But he rarely ventures from bed as he watches TV, listens to the radio and talking books, and ponders his plight of virtual immobility.

HIS PARENTS are dead. And he



Bob Sklar

has few visitors at the Oak Hill Care Center on Grand River, his home for the past two years.

Thanks to the ventilator, his medical condition is stable. But modern medicine isn't advanced to the point where he'll ever be able to use his arms and discard the ventilator. As he put it: "I realized I'd be spending the next 20 years in an institution, cut off pretty much from life."

Frustrated, withdrawn, impassive and angry, he feels useless to both society and himself. He had so many dreams to fulfill. He wanted to get married, have children, work hard in a career — enjoy life.

Naturally gregarious, he misses interacting with others. "I'm angry with I realize what I've lost," he told the Observer. "I don't see any reason to continue with an empty shell of an existence."

IF ANYONE can speak from experience about the need for right-to-

die legislation, it's Rivlin, who has considered pulling the plug for a year.

"A person, I believe, has the right to say they want artificial means disconnected," he said. "This is necessary in Michigan. But I think I should have the right without going to court for it."

The kicker is that doctors must render him unconscious and disconnect the ventilator. He wants no food and water if he lapses into a coma. A court order is needed to protect the doctors from liability even though, the Oakland County prosecutor and the Michigan attorney general have said they won't intervene.

Rivlin's case is a classic example of medical technology sustaining a quality of life apparently not worth living. "I'm just tired of being hooked up," he said. "It's artificial. I've hated it from the beginning. I've tried to live with it. But I can't."

I don't know how I'd feel in the same circumstances. But I believe David Rivlin should have the right to die.

I can't think of a more personal decision than deciding whether to accept life-sustaining, long-term medical treatment.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Our schools State aid and more needed

WHY DO some public school children receive a better education than others?

A guide to the question and solutions appears elsewhere within this newspaper.

Observer & Eccentric Newspaper reporters examined the question from all angles. They compared local districts not only with each other but also with the districts to which our schools compare themselves.

As material was gathered, several factors became clear.

The state's current school aid formula is a failure. Although designed to smooth out financial differences between rich and poor school districts, gross inequality still exists.

Far too often, the quality of a child's education is dependent upon his or her address. The situation is indefensible morally, let alone on legal grounds, and can hardly benefit a society that increasingly demands well-educated, well-trained members.

It is not as if taxpayers are shirking their responsibilities to local schools. In several instances, home owners in less wealthy districts, with lower property tax assessments, are paying more in school taxes than their neighbors in wealthier districts.

WE ADVOCATE a change in the state aid formula, allowing taxpayers in these financially pressed, heavily taxed school districts to provide their children with an education that is bare minimum, gives them a fighting chance for success in college or the job market.

The Michigan Legislature deserves some praise for finally agreeing to put something before voters, although we're disappointed they passed the buck by putting two proposals on the Nov. 7 ballot.

Ending two years of deadlocks, lawmakers have placed before voters two methods of pumping more money into public schools. Meanwhile, citizens groups are preparing their own property tax cut plan.

After years of ranting against tax increases, the politicians acknowledged that some kind of tax increase is the only way more money can be found for education. No amount of political sleight-of-hand could obscure that fact.

The schools need a better state aid formula, and they need it now.

BUT INCREASED state aid is only a partial solution. Local school boards and local govern-

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.

Thanks for OCC stories

To the editor:

On behalf of Oakland Community College's faculty and staff, I would like to express our appreciation to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for the comprehensive coverage we have received over the years.

We particularly enjoyed the fine editorial and feature stories that appeared in the June 8 editions marking the onset of our silver anniversary.

Staff writer James Radebaugh's interviews of four of our students gave an excellent set of insights into the reasons why people come to OCC and what they think of the institution.

We have been in the business of helping people create new futures for themselves for the last 25 years.

OCC has made an overwhelmingly positive difference in the lives of our students and in the community, but over a quarter of a century, some parts of our physical plant have begun to show signs of wear, and some of our instructional equipment needs to be updated.

We thank your editorial writer for characterizing us as "a valued asset to this dynamic community" . . . and we look forward to the community's participation in the celebra-

tions we are planning for the coming year.

R. Stephen Nicholson,
chancellor
Oakland Community College

Story slant was unfair

To the editor:

This is in response to the article published March 2, titled, "Hospitals Shift Radiologic Tech Training to OCC."

As educators in the field of Radiologic Technology, we are pleased to bear about a new program beginning. This is an approach to solving the massive technologist shortage we are suffering from today.

However, this article was written in a manner unfair to hospital-based Radiologic Technology programs. We are proud of our programs and our students.

Our students participate in the same coursework, yet receive an additional benefit by being involved in the daily examinations of our Diagnostic Radiology Department for the duration of the program.

Our graduates also take the credentialing examination offered by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists. We prefer a smaller class size to obtain a strong-

er student to instructor ratio at a fraction of the cost.

For information regarding these programs, contact the director of our School of Radiologic Technology.

Millie Massey, supervisor,
School of Radiologic Technology,
Providence Hospital,
Southfield

Ranney says he's indebted

To the editor:

First, I wish to congratulate Jack Cotton and Helen Ditzhazy on their re-election to the Farmington Board of Education. They have been most gracious in their victory.

Second, I wish to thank the nearly 500 persons who ventured out into the rain to vote for me. I am indebted to all of them.

Though the campaigning is over for a while, some of us will continue striving for open communications with the community, the effective use of our financial resources, uniformly excellent education throughout the district, and the accreditation of all our schools.

We will keep alive the kind of debate that stimulates interest and prevents stagnation.

Robert Ranney,
Farmington Hills

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