

OBSERVATION POINT

Legislature To Blame For Local School Crisis

By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

It's hard to overstate the crisis faced by local schools in the face of proposed cuts in state aid to education.

Gov. Milliken says that to help balance the expected \$108 million state budget deficit, state per pupil aid to local districts will have to be chopped by 2%.

Even more damaging to some school systems in this area is the plan to cut funds covered by the "grandfather clause" (a provision in the law which guarantees every school district no less state aid money per child than it got last year — by a total of \$12 million statewide.

TAKEN BY themselves, the proposed cuts are serious enough. But they come on top of an already critical situation faced by local school systems.

Last year the state Supreme Court ruled that schools were required to furnish books and materials used by students free of charge.

In this area, the ruling cost Southfield schools \$200,000, Farmington around \$250,000, and Livonia nearly \$500,000. Other area schools have been equally hard hit.

Ever since teachers and other school employees won the right to bargain wages and working conditions with school boards, intense upward pressure has been exerted on school budgets.

Simultaneously, a taxpayer revolt has developed. School officials who two years ago were confident of getting increased millage from the local voters are now scared even to try to renew already passed taxes.

ALL THESE factors made life miserable for local school systems. But with the current state budget crunch and the proposed cuts in state support for local schools, the situation is fast approaching a disaster.

Southfield school officials estimate that the district will lose more than \$1 million from cuts in the grandfather clause and more than \$60,000 from the 2% aid cut. Plymouth will drop \$280,000 in grandfather money and \$40,000 from the aid reduction.

Farmington schools, despite staff cuts and elimination of some programs such as basketball for eighth graders, still face a projected budget deficit. Redford Union schools will lose \$74,000 in state aid, and South Redford's total slash will be over \$420,000.

Livonia school district,

which includes part of Westland, will lose between \$270,000 and \$300,000 in per pupil aid, and Garden City's schools face a cut of \$130,000.

I haven't talked to a school official in this area who doesn't say that his district either faces a deficit or will have to tighten its belt heroically to avoid one.

THE IMMEDIATE cause for all the hassle is the prolonged strike against General Motors Corp., which both cut state tax revenue and increased state payments for things like unemployment compensation and welfare. In the background is the nationwide recession, felt in Michigan more sharply than elsewhere.

It's hard to point the finger of blame at any one group for causing either the strike against GM or the national recession.

But one group which must face up to its responsibility is the state legislature, which must soon pass final approval on the education aid cuts proposed by the governor.

THE UNDERLYING cause for the current crisis in local education is that the state legislature has been either unable

or unwilling to fix up Michigan's silly tax situation.

Local property tax support for schools has gone as far as it can go, but the legislature has failed to substitute anything for it. State tax revenues are not growing fast enough to ease the burden, yet the legislature has failed to come up with a replacement.

Now that the crunch has come, it looks as though the legislature will duck its responsibility and throw the whole mess back in the laps of local school systems by passing on the state aid cuts.

People move to the suburbs for a variety of reasons but important among them is the excellence of schooling provided by suburban schools. Unless the legislature wakes up and decides to make it possible for local communities to support the kinds of schools they want, suburban schools may well experience the chaos currently ruining Detroit's system.

Time is getting short.

If plain folks here in the suburbs write their state legislators urging them to face up to their responsibility, something might be done. Otherwise, schools in the suburbs will be seriously — perhaps irreparably — damaged.

Tim Richard writes

Starts Drive To Ban Throwaways

"There are bigger problems than throwaway bottles and bigger men than me to handle them. But this is one I can sink my hooks into."

The speaker was Patrick J. Norton, who is mayor of Wayne though he looks young enough to be president of the Jaycees, and he was attempting to convince suburban mayors and councilmen to join his city soon in a massive municipal movement to ban throwaway beverage bottles.

These bottles are what Norton, in governmental jargon, refers to as "solid waste" but which you and I call "trash." Some 10 billion of these throwaway bottles have been manufactured in the last five or six years, says Norton, and they create headaches for solid waste management and as litter.

THE MANUFACTURERS

say this is only a small part of solid waste. What they don't say is that 77 per cent of solid wastes disintegrate. Glass does not.

"Are throwaway bottles something we've really got to have to make this country go forward?" he asks, and then answers: "No. It's a manufactured desire — manufactured by the glass industry and sold to beverage manufacturers."

Just a few short years ago, in 1960, throwaways amounted to only two per cent of sales, Norton said. Today throwaways account for 66 per cent of sales.

What's more, he said, the availability of non-returnable bottles is turning us into a nation of wastrels. Coca-Cola officials told him that in the days before throwaways, 90 per cent of deposit bottles were recycled; today only 58 per cent of the returnables are recycled.



And to the argument that banning throwaways will put people out of work, Norton replies: "They don't mention the people in recycling plants who were put out of work by throwaways."

The problems of our junked-up landscape and wastage of resources are immense, and banning the throwaway bottle is only one part of it. But as Mayor Pat Norton of Wayne points out:

HIS POLITICAL strategy is this:

He's putting together a report and drafting a model ordinance banning throwaways. Then he will send out copies to 35 cities in the metropolitan area that have shown some interest in the problem.

He will ask them all to pass the ordinance within a three-week period. That way, the problem can get massive attention and intense public exposure. "The papers would be full of it, day after day. It would have real impact."

There would be one interesting legal point to the model ordinance, he adds. It wouldn't take effect until a year later. Thus, merchants and manufacturers would have a chance to adjust, first of all. More importantly, the Michigan Legislature would be put under pressure to pass a state law banning throwaways.

Which is what Norton really wants. It does little good to ban throwaways in one town when the customer can literally cross Joy Road or Eight Mile and buy them in the next town. A state law is needed.

THE GLASS industry in the past has lobbied intensely against such laws. Norton said the Washington State Legislature is currently investigating how much Owens-Illinois Glass Co. spent to persuade voters to reject 3-2 a state referendum banning throwaways.

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"We've got to take a part we can win with."

Taxpayer Dissents

By ALLEN YOUNG  
Livonia

The January 6 edition of the Livonia Observer announced the delay in mailing the city tax bills. This is a serious matter for those residents whose taxes are paid from mortgage company escrow accounts. Since the bills probably did not arrive in time for the companies to make payment before the 31 December cutoff date on income tax deductions. The resulting income tax penalty could amount to 200 or 300 dollars for the unfortunate taxpayer.

The article did not make clear just which county or city office was directly responsible for the delay. The public is entitled to know. A deluge of complaints to that office is in order.

It is obvious that the tax billing schedule is too closely timed for the end of the year. It does not provide an adequate safety factor for unanticipated delays. It is clearly a case of inadequate planning, and such incompetence should not go unnoticed.

Livonia has for years had a

DISSENT

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WILLIAM J. BABINGTON  
Farmington

The language of Proposition C was explicit. It stated clearly that no money should be allotted or appropriated to non-public schools.

The attorney general read this statement. He stated that the signatures were not valid and the proposition should not be allowed by the Supreme Court.

He was overruled.

THE PROPOSAL WAS passed for two reasons: a vast number of people didn't know the exact meaning of the wording of the proposition; and many people voted their prejudices, both Catholic parochial supporters and folks who didn't want the money to be channeled through non-public schools.

The wording said no money, which means shared time, bussing, health aid etc.

Until this legal tangle is unwoven the attorney general and the Cardinal are in accord.

The attorney general said no money can go to non-public schools and the Cardinal says without such aid the schools — all the parochial schools under his jurisdiction — will close. The schools with black students in the city and the schools in the suburbs where the parents save and sacrifice to give their children a quality, if non-integrated, education.

Both the Cardinal and the attorney general are right.

The people who drafted the proposition in the first place were mainly public school administrators, some misguided souls and just plain prejudiced people.

The result was a religious issue superficially inflamed to the point where the poor voter thought he was doing well and thoroughly confused, brought about more than he meant.

The court now must decide. Both the court in Michigan and the Supreme Court of the United States in the Pennsylvania case.

The only real losers are our children — Catholic and otherwise — Jew and Gentile, white and black.

I don't envy either court. No matter how they rule they will be reviled. It is a case of "damned if they do and damned if they don't."

reputation for being a high tax area. We residents assume that we are receiving a fair measure for our dollar. Perhaps we assume too much. Fairness of taxes is a relative matter. We measure fairness by what we are paying as compared to others, and by the relative services received.

Your newspaper could provide a public service by publishing a tax comparison for comparable dwellings in other communities in the metropolitan area. A relative evaluation of services provided would assist in this comparison. Perhaps we are not being overtaxed, but I will suggest that the average taxpayer is not convinced.

(Editor's Note: Livonia and Redford Township had the same problems with late tax bills which are sent out by the county. Computer problems are blamed for the delay. We will take every possible means to get a comparable tax table and an evaluation of services provided in Observerland communities)

Editorial & Opinion

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Sense And Nonsense

Frank Whitfield of 14540 Park Ave., Livonia, read an Observer editorial column "No Spot For Thin Skins" that alluded to changing connotations of the word "cop."

He submitted a letter stating, "I may be able to elaborate on the origin of the word. Many years ago in England it was practice to post the duty roster outside every police station."

"The heading on this was CONSTABLES ON PATROL. Hence the term (first letters used): COP."

We add: no doubt those constables exhibited much PRIDE, INTEGRITY and GUTS, such as a California police department has adopted as the meaning of PIGS.