

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road / Farmington, MI 48336

Tom Baer editor / 477-5450

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School agenda Finances are at top of list

SO WHAT'S the big issue for 1991 in the Farmington Public Schools? To borrow from the parlance of a former governor of Michigan, "that issue is... finances! finances! finances!"

And it will be more of the same (finances) even after Tuesday, Feb. 5, when district voters decide the fate of a school millage increase.

Michael Flanagan, superintendent of the Farmington Schools, has said that it will be "a totally different district" if the two-proposal request for additional funds fails.

He said in a recent interview that he's surprised the Realtors aren't screaming in support of the millage increase. So many people have paid big bucks for houses in suburbia because they thought the schools were good.

An increase of 2.7 mills is being asked for operations and another 1 mill for capital projects. School officials claim that, in seeking the increase, they are trying to replace cuts in state aid — \$5.8 million to date with a potential for \$10 million.

Deep cuts in school programs will have to be made if the millage increase is not approved, said Flanagan.

OF COURSE, not everyone sees the need for the increase. An economist for the fiscally conservative Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. has said that the district needs to pare spending further before it asks taxpayers for more.

A town hall-type meeting on the millage is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 28, at Harrison High School on 12 Mile. Flanagan and school trustee Sue Rennels will be on hand to field questions. People with concerns should attend.

This is not an endorsement of the millage (our advice to voters will appear in this space on Jan. 31), but we are glad to see that the school people are finally talking up in its behalf.

They're asking for the money, after all, and it's not too much to expect them to tell the community why they need it — and answer a few more tough questions in the process.

If someone doesn't start thumping the tub for this millage soon, it will surely be defeated. After all, the full weight and influence of the Alexander Hamilton seems to be against it.

— OF COURSE, there are other issues, other items for the 1991 Farmington school agenda. In our opinion, some of them are:

- Gifted education — The issue will still be around, cuts or no cuts. Generally, we approve of

a five-year plan to bring the gifted back into the classroom setting (mainstreaming the brilliant, if you will) rather than pulling them out. This represents a change in philosophy, and some parents are bound to disagree. But we're glad the board is finally going forward with it after more than a year of pondering.

- Cultural awareness — People say the recent fight at Farmington High School had nothing to do with the ethnic origins of the participants. OK, but let's admit that students of differing backgrounds at times have had problems getting along. The schools need to continue the effort to help students and staff understand each other.

- Attendance boundaries — The four middle schools should be open to students who live anywhere in the district, just as the three senior highs are. The problem is that Power and Dunclel middle schools will probably need renovations before that can happen. Will there be money? Check back on Feb. 6 — the day after the millage election.

- Renovations — We hate to be critical, but more than one person has told us over the years that the Farmington Schools just don't have the look of a wealthy district in Oakland County. We'd like to see the schools spend what they can (that 1 mill would provide about \$2.5 million per year) to make improvements. Apparently, little was done in the pre-Flanagan days. The district should spend what it can on improvements, millage or no.

- Common campus — Let's have more like Highmeadow, the elementary school where students' afternoons are reserved for an enriched program of art and music and the like. Such a program encourages the youngsters to expand their horizons and be creative. If that happens, a school system is certainly doing its job. There's a waiting list to get into Highmeadow, and parents seem to be getting involved.

- Substance abuse — There are the so-called Student Assistance Teams, made up of students and staff, in the middle and high schools to provide counsel about things like self-esteem and peer pressure. It's a step in the right direction. The schools are providing active leadership in the fight against the teenage drug problem. For too long, the schools relied on other community groups, like Farmington Families in Action. Not to be flippant about it, but perhaps the assistance teams could counsel some of the parents in the community. The drug and booze problems are at that level, too.

War debate Congress must speak out

IT'S ABOUT TIME for the reticent Michigan congressional delegation to speak out on the Persian Gulf crisis. So far for the most part they have been close-mouthed.

If Congress is to play a role in determining whether America goes to war to force Iraq's Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait — and we believe Congress should — then our representatives had better begin sounding off loud and fast. Until now, members of the House and Senate have remained strangely silent on the possibility of war. The same politicians who wouldn't shut up last fall when it came to the federal budget snafu have been deathly quiet as greater numbers of American soldiers were ordered into the Middle East last fall.

So we were encouraged this week to hear Rep. William Ford, D-Taylor, speak against an attack by the U.S. on Iraqi troops occupying Kuwait. Ford, whose district includes southern Livonia, Westland, Garden City and Canton Township, told the Observer & Eccentric he opposes the use of U.S. military force at this time.

"If I could talk to the president directly, I'd tell him 'George, you've taken leave of your senses,'" Ford said.

Detroit's Democratic Rep. Dennis Hertel, whose district includes Troy, also opposes a military offensive. The naval blockade established last August should be given more time, he said.

OTHER REPRESENTATIVES from western Wayne and Oakland counties appear to be playing it safe, calling for debate but refusing to take much of a stand. For example, William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, and a ranking party member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said a fruitless debate would send the wrong message to Hussein — that the country is divided and in no mood for war.

In that regard though, maybe Broomfield isn't far from the truth. Recent polls show that 61 percent of the public approves of a quick military strike against Iraq, though support drops to 30 percent when the very real prospect of 10,000 American casualties is mentioned.

Congress today will most likely begin to debate U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf. A vote authorizing President George Bush to order a military strike could come by week's end.

A vocal debate — and a strong consensus on what, if any military action is required — will keep America out of another "Vietnam." Ameri-

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— Rep. William Ford

ans simply cannot economically afford nor emotionally stomach once again the consequences of a president's running roughshod over Congress in order to achieve changing and often undetectable military objectives.

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE and Senate, including Michigan's congressional delegation, should have plenty to say for the record and they should say it forcefully. It is both their moral duty and their responsibility as elected officials.

It also may be the only way to persuade a president who seems determined to go to war that other options — the current sanctions/negotiations — should be given more time.

Direct American military intervention in any situation should require a decisive mandate from Congress for the president. Should President Bush fail to receive such a mandate, he should rethink his strategy.

To reach a consensus, the discussion on Capitol Hill must focus on:

- The immediate situation, not a debate on the extent or validity of the War Powers Act.
- Is military intervention required to handle the current situation, or would it be improperly based on speculation about what Hussein might or might not do at some future date?
- Worthwhile objectives as opposed to potential body counts.

We agree that Hussein's army must withdraw from Kuwait, a sovereign, non-hostile state. Aggression like Hussein's shouldn't be rewarded or even tolerated.

Neither should the U.S. go to war to restore the balance of power in Kuwait to the former emir. American intervention should require a new Democratic Kuwait in return.

MOST AMERICANS would likely agree that such complex, serious and potentially life-threatening issues deserve a full discussion by all our elected representatives.

If we have learned anything from the Vietnam experience, it is that the time to speak out is before the bloodshed begins.



New guy snoops in on workers' private lives

I'VE ALWAYS been leery of throwing stones. Never seems to be much justice in it. Usually the guy throwing stones is leaving one at some defenseless lug who is just doing his best to survive.

You've got to figure that stone throwers are pretty insecure people, hiding their own inadequacies.

AMERICAN politics is full of stone throwers. You know, they sling stones every which way, especially during election time, usually to cover their own indiscretions.

Stone throwing comes in a number of different forms. We are most familiar with the bald-faced campaign mudslinging. We don't like it, but have come to almost expect it as part of the American electoral system.

But much more insidious are the files that politicians and other government types keep on one another.

The late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover set the standard in this country. We have some homegrown examples, such as the Red Squad files kept by our own Michigan State Police back in the bad old days of the protesting '60s.

Such practices, of course, reek of totalitarianism and are simply unacceptable in a democracy.

NOW A NEW even more remarkable wrinkle has been added to the plethora of ways to intimidate public officials.

It seems that newly elected Gov. John Engler has taken the art one step beyond. Candidates for high-

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Steve Barnaby

level appointment in his new government are required to answer a rather strange set of questions which are tantamount to peeping Tomism.

From the tone of the questions, it is obvious that our new Republican chief executive has little respect for others' rights to privacy. The tone of the questions also suggests a mentality in his administration which borders on pettiness — a danger for any mature and responsible ruling body.

Take a gander at some of these questions:

"Are you the parent of a child or children born out of wedlock?"

"Do you consume alcoholic beverages? If so describe the extent of your consumption?"

"Do you have any parking tickets that have remained unpaid for more than 30 days?"

Geez. Really governor. This kind of questionnaire is an insult to Michigan voters. You have taken a perfectly respectable part of government and trivialized it.

WE CAN ONLY imagine your diligent aides poring over applications, giggling and snorting as they read the answers.

Of course, Engler's aides assure us this information remains strictly confidential. Confidential, my eye. No information is confidential if more than one person has access to it.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of the 13 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

from our readers

Tax dollars not used well

To the editor:
In the Jan. 3 and 7 issue of the Observer, average SAT and ACT college entrance exam test scores were reported for students in Farmington Public Schools.

It is not acceptable that our students performed less than one point above average on the ACT test and actually below average on the SAT test.

It should also be noted that not only are these scores quite mediocre, but they represent a decline in performance on these tests.

The SAT results dropped below last year's results and the insignificant gap between Farmington ACT results and state average ACT results was narrowed to less than one point.

This does not bode well for gains in our district trying to gain admission to the better colleges and universities.

In view of the fact that, with or without the passage of the Feb. 5 school tax increase proposals, Farmington spends one of the highest amounts per student in the state and most of our students come from rel-

atively affluent homes, it is unreasonable that our test scores are only at or below state average.

Our tax dollars are not being effectively used by our school administrators. Taxpayers are paying top dollar for mediocre results.

Before the community votes itself another tax increase for the school system, it should ask the district to make better use of the taxes it already receives.

I encourage people to learn the facts and vote on Tuesday, Feb. 5.

Richard DeVries,
Farmington Hills

His world is so silly.

To the editor:
My observation of the following Senate ethics hearings — silly.

Recent sin taxes — silly.

Approaching school millage tax — silly.

Recent political junkets to Saudi Arabia — silly.

Outrageous sport salaries — silly.

Jan. 15 deadline to Saddam — silly.

Blanchard paroles — silly.

Radio talk shows — silly.

Media subjective views — silly.

Media of the year — silly.

In conclusion, the United States has become a silly nation.

Earl W. Shedy,
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in the From Our Readers column.

If submitting a letter to the editor for publication in this column, please submit the letter with an original to the editor. Letters must be signed and include the address of the sender.

Letters will be published only if the best of reasons, and the decision to do so will be made by the editor.

Letters should be mailed to the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

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