

Opinion

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Tom Baer editor

O&E Thursday, March 7, 1991

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Course not! Copper Creek not for city

SOMEONE MUST have shouted "Fore!" because the Farmington Hills City Council (five of the seven, anyway) ducked out of buying a golf course in the northwestern part of the city, that is.

The city council made a smart move back on Feb. 18 when it voted, 5-2, not to purchase the unfinished nine-hole Copper Creek Country Club.

Not only did the council gladden the hearts of most of the residents of the brand new, upscale Copper Creek development, but it probably saved the city a lot of headaches (and maybe even a lawsuit) down the road.

Now Farmington Hills is already in the golf course business. It owns the nine-hole San Marino public layout on Halsted between 11 Mile and 12 Mile. By all accounts, things are going well there.

But Copper Creek, while it's only about a mile up Halsted Road from San Marino, is truly a course of another culture.

WINDING AS it does around some upscale residential development, Copper Creek Country Club simply doesn't have the configuration to be a public golf course.

And what about the people who pay top dollar to live in those Copper Creek dwellings? They were told by Biltmore Development Co. of Troy that they'd be getting out on a high-style championship golf course and country club.

Now, with the news that the course may be city-owned and public, many Copper Creek residents have visions of beer cans and hot dog wrappers littering their manicured lawns.

The developers leased the course to Stan Aldrich, a well-known golf course operator, for 50 years, but apparently he now wants nothing to do with it. Why is a golfing venture here in the heart of the green-lawn kingdom a failure before it's even started?

Good question. Simple answer: No liquor license and little chance of obtaining one because of the residential character of the area. Sad, isn't it?

Bad policy Don't exempt seniors from tax

ONE PART of Gov. John Engler's property tax reform is headed for trouble. Liberals and conservatives alike are saying it would be unwise to exempt senior citizens from school operating property taxes. Even some senior citizens admit it's bad policy.

The idea of exempting seniors has some superficial charm. "My kids are grown up. I don't have any kids in school. I've paid my share," the argument goes.

Once that can of worms is open, however, a parade of people will come forward and ask to be exempted from one tax or another.

Young workers can ask to be let off the Social Security hook at least until they get closer to retirement age.

• "Doves" can ask to withhold the share of their taxes that goes for military purposes.

• The overwhelming majority who never file a civil lawsuit can ask to avoid taxes supporting the civil docket.

• Older folks will be back asking for a break from taxes for half diamonds and wave ponds that are used mostly by kids.

The list of services any one group doesn't use can become mind-boggling.

UNLESS HE only wanted to curry favor with one voting bloc, it's difficult to understand why Engler would even propose the idea. And there are far better ways to help those in need than exempting all seniors from school operating taxes.

Senior citizens would still be eligible to vote on

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at how booze decides the success or failure of so many businesses.

BEN MARKS, one of the two dissenters on council, said he feels it's the city's responsibility to provide wholesome recreation like golf for the residents.

He added that he was certain that revenue from the Copper Creek course would easily pay off the bonds that would be used to finance the purchase. He cited the success of San Marino, which has that coveted liquor license.

Marks is right, in a way, about the city needing to provide recreation for its citizens. But that brings us to another point: The time for buying land in golf course quantities was the late 1960s and early '70s when more of it was available and affordable.

The folks who governed in the late-township and early-city days should have realized that and purchased land for the parks and golf course of the '80s and '90s.

Of course, the mentality two decades ago was that, in upscale Farmington Hills, every man's home is his park, whether it has a simple sand box or a fancy in-ground swimming pool. Unfortunately, that is still the thinking by too many officials in too many of our communities.

Golf is an excellent activity, and Farmington Hills is lucky to have one successful public course. The city council was right to leave well enough - and Copper Creek - alone.

malice proposals - Engler's proposal wouldn't change that. It would be patently unfair to allow seniors to vote on a tax they didn't have to pay.

On the contrary, it's good public policy for everyone to take an interest in public education. Older folks have shown strong charitable instincts in doing volunteer work for schools, serving on advisory committees and on boards of education. They should stay interested.

The state Treasury Department estimates that the senior citizen exemption, if enacted, would cost \$500 million annually by the time it's fully implemented in 1993. That is an enormous bite.

The equivalent of another recession on the \$7.4 billion state budget. Even the Headlee II property tax cut proposal, a more drastic plan than Engler's, doesn't contemplate exempting seniors entirely from school property taxes.

THE CHIEF FLAW in the plan is that it would pay an expensive benefit to an entire class of people whether or not they all need the benefit.

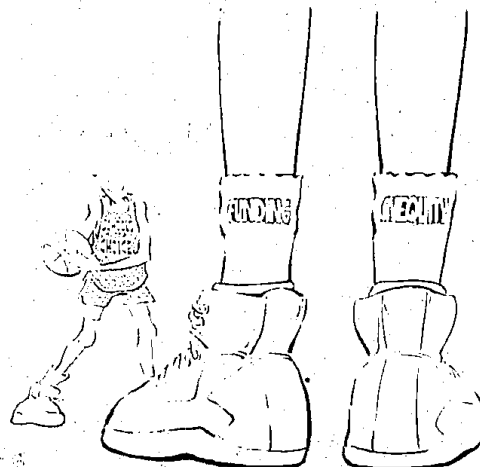
Engler already has proposed lifting the \$1,200 per household ceiling on the "current breaker" - the income tax break for people who pay more than 3.5 percent of their household incomes in property taxes. He would raise the ceiling by \$100 a year to a new ceiling of \$2,500 and then increase that benefit with the rate of inflation. That idea is sound.

Such a tax break would be a justifiable benefit to people who retire and find their incomes reduced while their property taxes continue to go up. It would go a long way to helping them remain in their present homes.

Michigan's property tax is burdensome. Our rates are high. In prosperous areas like the suburbs, assessments have increased faster than general inflation, certainly faster than paychecks.

Engler and legislators from both parties are correct in saying state government should devote a larger part of its budget to education. Twenty years ago the state was spending half its budget on schools, community colleges and education. Today education gets about one-third of the budget. The results have been higher property taxes and higher college tuitions.

The correct solution would be to lower property taxes generally and cap assessment increases that homeowners have endured. The "generation gap" in America is wide enough without fueling it by giving one generation a \$500 million break.



Homefront becomes a battlefield in war, too

The image is all too clear. We've seen it before. We know we shall see it again. A woman, in mourning, stands surrounded by a coterie of family and friends.

A soldier, in great military style, presents her with a folded flag, recently draped over the casket of her son or husband. The image fades and soon the public forgets about the woman and the flag.

War offers up a multitude of wounds. Some heal in days, some months and others take years. Most can be mended with sufficient medical care.

But America, a country unfamiliar with casualties on the homefront, has typically neglected those who continue to fight our wars long after the treaties have been signed, the flags and ribbons put away and the memorials erected.

Marian Faye Novak changes all that. And those who seek a deeper understanding of war and the dirty scars it leaves, should pick up a copy of her newly published book, "Lonely Girls With Burning Eyes."

IT WOULD be nice to believe that Ms. Novak is writing only about another time. But, in truth, what happened to her and the small group of friends in the 1960s is just as relevant and lasting as the history of war through the ages.

Her story, sculpted around the Vietnam War, could have just as easily been the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Persian Gulf.

With great emotion and authority, she writes about soldiers torn away

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Steve Barnaby

AS MS. NOVAK so ably tells us, the real war for many wives only begins after the peace treaties are signed. The battlefronts often are their living rooms and bedrooms, where dreams are challenged and often shattered. All too often, treaties are signed in divorce courts or in drug and alcoholic treatment centers, years after the shooting stops.

If you have ever been through the experience, reading Ms. Novak's story will make you remember. It will make you laugh, it will make you cry and it will make you understand, better than ever, the real tragedy of war.

If you are a person who wants to gain a deeper understanding of what war does to personal relationships, why a person you love may have a tough time dealing with emotions, you'll want to read this book.

"I've had to find a way to live with the memories," she said in a recent interview. "That is what made me who I am."

And with her book, Ms. Novak will help many others live with the memories. And for those of us who know, we can only say, "thanks."

from our readers

His thoughts on Gulf War

To the editor:

This is in response to Arlene Victor's letter (Feb. 26 Observer) entitled "Work for Diplomatic Solution." I would like to make some suggestions and pose some questions.

First, I respect her right to her opinions and share with her that war is abhorrent.

My first suggestion is that she and her 20 friends do a little studying before entering into a discussion of the war. For their first study session, I suggest they look up the word, "appeasement," in any good dictionary and then study the events leading up to both world wars.

As events are currently unfolding in the Persian Gulf, this may be the bloodiest of any war in modern times. At the cost of a reduced number of lives, President Bush has opted to save countless more lives in the future. I commend him for this.

WHERE is there a loss of truth in the media? The only loss of truth I observe, has been in the reports of the war coming out of Baghdad. This has been the most minutely reported war ever.

We here know more about this war than the soldiers fighting it. The frequent press conferences conducted by the military have been outstanding and candid.

America's superiority in high-tech weapons is primarily responsible for the fewer lives lost. The Patriot missile, particularly, has saved countless lives by intercepting SCUD missiles, aimed at civilian targets.

Who are the people commercially exploiting the war? I would hazard a guess that they live in the more affluent sections of our society, like the Birmingham of the country. A little retrospective reflection may be in order.

What does understanding another culture have to do with murder, robbery and pillage?

Is Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait any less savage and brutal because he is of a different culture than ours?

Our planet is a small place. In order to survive, we must respect the rights of others. Respecting the rights of others does not include taking their property and killing them.

IS A GOVERNMENT policy on oil conservation the answer to future wars? The government is attempting to force manufacturers to produce much more fuel efficient cars. Detroit is up in arms about this.

I also notice that the largest gas guzzlers of all, are usually in the most affluent parts of society, like the Birmingham of the country. Surely we cannot deny these their luxurious toys.

Spending more money for the poor, minorities, the unemployed, the homeless and the sick is certainly a commendable objective. If spending more money would indeed improve the lot of these individuals.

There are alternatives. One is community involvement and volunteerism. If I might suggest that women who have time to sit around and discuss the war, could find some satisfaction out of spending time with the sick, the homeless and the poor, particularly if this is one of their major concerns.

I would finally like to see a list of the other ways of handling disputes and working out cooperative arrangements that Victor says women know how to do, in her last paragraph.

I hope and pray that President Bush's "new world order" does not turn out to be a tragic nightmare, but that it stabilizes conditions in the Gulf and is the basis for a lasting peace and prosperity there and throughout the world.

Ed Conshens,
Farmington Hills

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