

Opinion

21998 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336 Tom Baer editor/477-5450

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School agenda Finance concerns near top

LAST YEAR about this time, we said that financing was the big issue in the Farmington Public Schools. A year has passed, but the same huge question looms: What is the fairest, most equitable way to pay for the education of our children.

Unlike last year, there's no millage increase election (with the accompanying campaign rhetoric) coming up in the Farmington District, although a millage renewal vote probably will be taken this year.

School financing can be a puzzling business these days what with this plan and that coming from Lansing. And, too, there are the statewide tax questions on the ballot in November to consider. The outcome could effect property taxes and thus school financing.

We urge Superintendent Michael Flanagan to stay in touch with what's happening in school fi-

ancing at the state level. We're pleased to note that the district's new finance director, Bruce Barrett, seems to have a handle on the day-to-day matters.

Of course, there are other issues for 1992, other goals we'd like to see accomplished.

For one thing, we'd like to see the entire school establishment become more "user friendly" — and that goes for everyone from the superintendent to the newest bus driver. They should remember that a public schools are a public entity. Many do remember, to their credit.

We're also encouraged by the school board's favorable vote on cable casting its meetings. We hope the TV cameras are rolling soon.

And, we're happy to see, the schools seem to be doing a lot of planning. There's a 10-year master plan for capital improvements, another for finances.

City agenda

A big year for a small city

DOWNTOWN redevelopment should remain an important item on the 1992 agenda of the city of Farmington, struggling to retain its small-town character while sandwiched between fast-growing Farmington Hills and Livonia.

Actually, the Farmington Downtown Development Authority has accomplished great things under director Wendy Strip-Sittsamer. We hope the good news keeps coming.

For many years, the merchants and the city seemed to have a hard time working together for the common good. But now they've come together with the help of the DDA. Such cooperation is needed these days. There are storefront vacancies in this tough economic climate.

The face of the city could change in the next few years as the "old-guard" leadership on the city council and in the administration retires.

Farmington for many years has been a stable community because of these people. Let's hope this positive aspect can be maintained as the names and faces change.

Farmington, we're happy to see, is looking to communicate better with its residents. There have been some problems in the past. Mayor Bill Harisock has called a special meeting to see how this can be accomplished.

This should be an interesting year for the city of Farmington, a town with a rich vein of history running through it. Farmington hits the big one-two-five this year (villagehood came in May 1867) — and the anniversary won't go unheralded.

Dozens of volunteers are planning a celebration, which will dovetail into Michigan Week (May) and the Founders Festival (July).

'Buy American' Quality, not loyalty, sells cars

ATHRIVING American auto industry must be our goal.

But for the industry to survive — something that is crucial to all of us in western Wayne and Oakland counties — the battle is improving product quality at home, a view supported by many industry insiders, watchers and others.

Many U.S. consumers are willing to "buy American" if the product is top quality.

The U.S. auto industry has the financial and intellectual resources to improve its product. And it must because automobiles and other related industries remain a vital part of the American economy.

INSTEAD OF asking Japan for trade concessions, government and business leaders should re-examine the role of managers in the U.S. auto industry, unlearning what they know and developing a coherent methodology for industrial revitalization, according to C.K. Prahalad, professor for corporate strategy at the University of Michigan.

Prahalad says most U.S. companies, including the Big Three, have traded the concept of profit through internal growth for one of profit by cutting costs.

"Restructuring, as in downsizing, is at best a short-term solution," Prahalad says. "This solution hardly addresses the underlying managerial weaknesses. Restructuring without basic change in the way the company operates simply leads to more restructuring."

Walter E. Huizenga, president of the American Auto Dealers Association, is also fed up with the short-term strategy favored by Detroit auto executives during the last decade.

It's time for governor to act

GOV. John Engler finally has an opportunity to demonstrate that he does stand up for Michigan workers.

Battered by the recession and an imploding American auto industry, many auto workers are wondering "where's Big John?"

If he is truly all the people's governor, we expect him to be on the front line fighting for the preservation of the General Motors Willow Run plant. Yet some see him as an aloof bystander on this very important issue.

This is a battle that has nothing to do with the Japanese or any other imagined foreign intruder. This has to do with preserving real jobs for Michigan workers.

GM executives soon will decide whether Willow Run's 2,600 workers will get the ax or whether the Arlington, Texas, Assembly Plant's 3,200 workers will lose their jobs.

We strongly believe that it is not only best for Michigan but better for the auto industry if the Arlington plant closes. Michigan has a dozen plants and nearly 25,000 jobs at risk in the GM downsizing.

Yet we hear little from Michigan's governor on this issue. Engler has promised to take his stand during his State of the State address Tuesday.

When considering Willow Run's fate, let's hope Engler doesn't opt for an Alamo-like last stand.



Iacocca's right: Remediating trade deficit is good sense

WHAT'S NEW about President Bush's trip to Japan is that he was accompanied by the leadership of the U.S. auto industry. As Chrysler's Lee Iacocca said Friday, "The Cold War is over. The Soviet threat is gone. Now we can start taking care of business, like Japan has been doing for the last 45 years."

What amazes me is how a series of presidents tolerated the progressive, wholesale liquidation of our nation's industrial base. Steel, Electronics, New autos.

We in Michigan know the numbers all too well. Since 1981 the Japanese have opened seven new transplant auto plants, the Big Three have closed nine plants, and the auto trade deficit has gone from \$14-billion to \$30 billion. Every new job created by Japanese auto investment in America has cost two old ones. The cumulative \$300 billion-plus auto trade deficit has cost our nation some seven million jobs.

As I understand it, there are two possible ideological or political justifications.

FIRST ARGUMENT: American consumers are better off with unrestricted international trade because overall they can buy better products at lower prices.

True enough. But is my personal short-term gain in being able to buy a slightly better car at a little lower price worth jeopardizing the long-term health of our nation's economy?

SECOND ARGUMENT: If we restrict international trade, we'll be protectionists, and it was protectionism that set off the Great Depression.

"Protectionist" has become a favorite epithet of the '90s, replacing "liberal," "communist" and "isolationist."

Already America is protectionist. As Tom Bray pointed out in Sunday's *Detroit News*, we "absolutely prevent" the export of raw timber and petroleum to Japan — two goods which by themselves could wipe out nearly the entire trade deficit.

But Iacocca was right: "We trade with about 200 countries all over the world, but two-thirds of our deficit is with one single nation — Japan."

Redressing the imbalance is not "protectionist." It's common sense.



Philip Power

I don't think it is. And that's why I get cross when some politicians tell me that the entire point of public policy is to make American consumers better off.

That's not public policy. That's pandering to avarice, making the satisfaction of personal greed our nation's primary objective.

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ALTHOUGH BUSH didn't intend it, Michigan has become the logical and inevitable stage for the issue to be played out in the sweep of American politics.

Michigan's presidential primary is March 17. There's plenty of time to see what Pat Buchanan says about "America First" in Flint. And I'd like to see what Tom Harkin or Bill Clinton propose to a bunch of jobless UAW members.

Bush may or may not have moved fast enough to rectify two decades of governmental neglect of our national economic interests. But I wonder whether the Michigan primary won't see angry auto executives sitting on their checkbooks while a lot of worried white- and blue-collar workers vote their hearts.

Especially when the *Houston Globe* reported Saturday that about two-thirds of the cars and trucks parked at the White House are foreign — mostly Japanese.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

from our readers

Candidates must address environment

To the editor:

This is an open letter to all of the U.S. presidential candidates:

There are several million citizens who are looking to vote for a presidential candidate who will take a stand to promote a sustainable environmental policy along with economic development that has minimum impact on the environment.

In order for you to capture the vote of these people, you are going to have to implement an environmental program that:

- Substantially reduces the generation of carbon dioxide.
- Stops the generation of upper atmospheric ozone destroying gases by 1995.
- Does not result in any loss of wetlands.
- Bans the export or import of pesticides and fungicides or any products that contain them that are prohibited in the United States.
- Bans the export and import of waste.

If we are to have a compassionate and responsible society, then you certainly will reverse shifting the tax burden away from the rich and onto those who have the least income.

I believe that you would be hard-pressed to find any responsible parent who would ever raise a family where some of their children would be given, five, 10, 20, 100 and in some cases 1,000 times more (i.e. income of executives, entertainers and athletes) than the other members of the family. Yet that is what our nation encourages.

If you want to achieve some success of world peace and a kinder and gentler nation, then establish a program that reaches down to all levels of society, that encourages and gives hope to all instead of just benefiting those who already have more than they need.

How can one expect peace when the rich are getting richer at the expense of the poor and middle classes, the environment and future generations?

It also is necessary for our leaders to attend and participate in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June and help lead the United Nations to obtain a sustainable environment that supports all species and people.

It's a blight on the U.S. and criminal that we are the only major power in opposition to the United Nations' recommendation to substantially reduce the generation of earth-warming gases and to eliminate upper-atmospheric ozone destroying gases.

Each of you has an opportunity to lead and accept the support of millions of citizens who want to leave a life-supporting natural heritage for the world and future generations.

What nobler cause or higher honor exists?

Harold L. Stokes, Redford Township

Let's thank the students

To the editor:

A special and sincere thanks to the students of the Farmington Schools who so willingly gave their time and also contributed generously in the collection of canned goods and assorted food products this year so that no needy family, child or senior citizen would be without a Christmas.

The food that was collected by the schools and given to the Goodfellows this year was estimated to be the largest ever.

The food packing and sorting crews, headed by Durward Heister and Fred Tuck, were overwhelmed with this year's generous response and stated that the food program would not have met their goals if it were not for the local schools and student involvement.

Special thanks to Farmington High National Honor Society, Harrison High National Honor Society and North Farmington High School Varsity Club. They made their presence known by selling papers and assisting in the delivery of food baskets.

Again, many thanks. We could not have done it without you.

Bob Snyder, Farmington

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