

School's in!

Mental adjustments needed

School isn't off to a very good start for some students and parents from a subdivision in northwest Farmington Hills.

There was a tragic accident at Strathmore and 13 Mile on the very first day of school, Aug. 25. A 16-year-old girl driving a Jeep hit a motorcyclist, killing him. The crash was witnessed by 25 secondary students waiting for their school bus.

Emotions over the incident seem to be running high with people in this area. Feelings have been rubbed raw.

Some youngsters were traumatized by what they saw — we're told the accident came to rest just a few feet from them. Many of their parents are angry that the Farmington School District makes kids wait for school buses on busy highways like 13 Mile.

School officials last week moved the bus stop into the supposed safety of the Strathmore subdivision. But on Friday came a report of a near-accident deep in the sub involving a school bus and car.

We're sorry for all involved who suffered... for the survivors of the dead man, for the 16-year-old who probably just got her license, for

the kids who saw the accident and the parents who are not happy taxpayers these days.

But maybe there's a lesson for all of us in this unfortunate occurrence as the new school year begins. The lesson is just this: School's in, and the kids are out, en masse, mornings and afternoons. Perhaps some mental adjustments are needed by drivers.

A major mental adjustment will be to remember to stop when the school bus lights are flashing to notify drivers that it is stopping to pick up students.

Remember to stop and wait until the flashing lights are turned off before proceeding. Impatient motorists who get worked up by the wait should look for other routes with fewer buses.

For the first couple of weeks in September, motorists should consciously look forward a block or two for a youngsters who just might be stepping into the roadway. Special care is also needed by motorists when turning where there are buses or students.

Motorists need to drive more defensively to compensate for the exuberance and impulsiveness of youth.

Hopefully, it'll be a safe school year for us all.

Get to work Inaction lengthens state ballot

It's November 1994 and Michiganders will vote on:

- A proposal that could slash property taxes by 10-20 percent in big cities and up to 90 percent on lakefronts and other desirable living areas. The proposal was placed on the ballot after a statewide Realtors association gathered the required 275,000 signatures in a petition drive.

- A referendum that eliminates sales tax on big-ticket purchases. Metro Detroit car dealerships distributed petitions at summer tent sales and in showrooms.

- A Michigan Education Association-backed proposal that ties teacher salary increases directly to property assessments. Local PTAs collected the signatures for this one.

Of course, none of this is true. But neither are the proposals listed above all that far-fetched, given the current climate of inaction in Lansing.

It's time for the Michigan Legislature to shake off the cobwebs and go back to work.

Michigan's representatives and senators — frozen by special-interest politics and fear of voter reprisals — have pretty much abandoned their essential legislative duty. That is setting government policy.

The proof is on this November's ballot, where voters will decide on a rate reform proposal pushed by AAA, the state's largest auto insurer. Without debating the merits of the AAA pro-

posal, we are troubled by its necessity in the first place and the trend it signals.

Auto insurance executives were pushed into action by a legislature that, together with Gov. John Engler, waffled on any meaningful insurance reform bill. When Engler vetoed the compromise that eventually worked its way out of the House and Senate, there weren't enough votes to override.

Elected officials have taken nearly the same non-approach on all but a handful of major issues to pass through Lansing in recent years. Failing to pass workable legislation, they dump complex issues in the hands of voters, usually in competing ballot proposals that often end up canceling each other out.

School finance reform was the sacrificial issue two years ago.

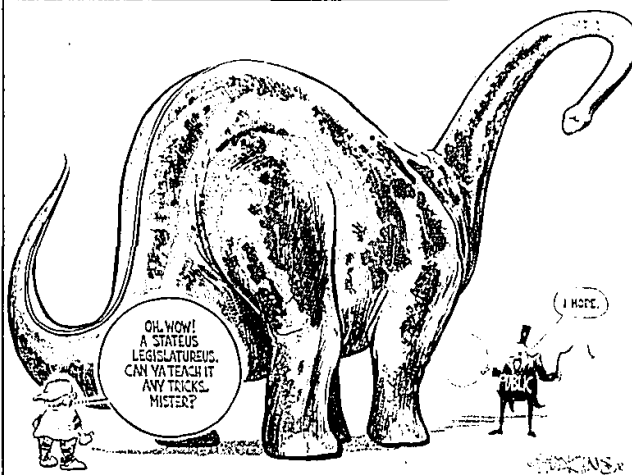
This fall, in addition to the AAA proposal, voters get two options on property taxes.

Ballot initiatives are fine. And the Constitutions (both state and U.S.) are emphatic in the right of the people to decide.

But handing special interest groups and regional power brokers with considerable resources free reign over the ballot is neither practical nor ethical.

The solution is for our legislators to stop playing footsie with lobbyists, stop worrying about public opinion polls and start doing what taxpayers elect them for and pay them to do. Legislate, guys. It's your job.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Focus on positive

The Farmington Observer article of Aug. 17 — and in particular its headline ("Historic civil rights tour upsets 2 students") — regarding the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights Freedom Tour are regrettable. They not only focus on the negative, but they also because they miss the big picture.

For four years, MCHR has sponsored the Freedom Tour, a unique youth project aimed at promoting cultural awareness and learning first-hand about the civil rights struggles in the United States.

The response from participants and the community has been overwhelmingly positive.

MCHR is dedicated to addressing one of society's most important challenges: Promoting racial harmony and cross-cultural understanding and respect.

Indeed, one of our efforts this year was to broaden our sensitivity on these matters by including Native American and Hispanic sites, in addition to the historic sites of the civil rights movement that have traditionally been the focus of the tour.

We have constantly striven to make the tour an attractive experience for youth of all racial

groups, but have not always found it easy to recruit a cross-section of youth from city and suburbs.

We look to the media, through responsible, balanced coverage to assist in making the tour more inclusive, not less.

We regret that two students on this year's Freedom Tour had a less-than-positive experience.

We do not take their concerns lightly, but rather we welcome the feedback of all participants, since we believe the Freedom Tour is a vital youth educational experience in the Metropolitan Detroit area, and we are constantly striving to improve it.

Kathryn Savoie, executive director,
Michigan Coalition for Human Rights

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Interest groups may split GOP

In the good ol' days, presidential candidates used the Labor Day weekend to rouse the troops on Detroit's Cadillac Square. This year the crowds will be sparse, the streets dirty, the candidates somehow less mythic. But the stakes will be just as high, maybe higher.

Michigan, the archetypical example of the hollowing out of America's manufacturing might, will be a key state in determining the next president.

Following the state Republican and Democratic conventions last weekend, the Labor Day break offers a time for a few reflections before we are overwhelmed by political hype and pandering.

A political party defines itself by determining "what to keep in, what to keep out," as the Bob Seger song says. Whom you try to attract or repel will define what your party is, what it stands for, to what swing groups it can appeal.

In these days of TV-driven politics, both parties have tended to bring in as many people as possible, to fudge their differences, to occupy the middle of the spectrum. Lee Atwater, the late national GOP chair, put it best when he talked about the necessity of the Republican Party's being "one big tent" in the context of the abortion issue.

So I was surprised to listen to the different rhetoric coming out of the national and then the Michigan state conventions last weekend.

Republicans were full of talk that I can describe only as exclusionary. Speakers defined the party in terms of what it was against.

Homosexuals and lesbians, certainly. Mothers who chose to work rather than staying home with the kids, probably. People who had been divorced or had a single-parent family, maybe. Taxers and liberals, by all means.

The litmus test, of course, was opposition to abortion. Gov. John Engler won the major fight of the convention when his candidate for the University of Michigan Board of Regents was opposed by Right to Life of Michigan because



PHILIP POWER

she was insufficiently ferocious in her opposition to abortion rights.

By contrast, the Democrats (for once thinking seriously they might win the presidency) were full of inclusionary talk. I heard the phrase "one big tent" more than once last weekend in Detroit.

Why the difference? History, as usual. The Republican coalition that has dominated American politics for the last 20 years appears to be falling apart.

Southern conservatives, Bloomfield Hills business types, anti-abortion blue-collar families from western Wayne and Macomb counties all could rally behind a program featuring social values, opposition to taxes and anti-Communism. But now that the Cold War is over and the spiraling deficit has gutted traditional economic theory, splits are starting to show up between the component groups.

And any complex group whose constituents are pulling in different directions is likely to value highly doctrinal purity. This entails defining who and what are out in exclusionary rhetoric.

Whether that gets votes in November remains to be seen.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What do you think is the most important issue in this year's Presidential race?

We asked this question at the downtown branch of the Farmington Community Library.



"I would say the economy. It's an issue that affects everyone."

Jackie Candela
Farmington Hills



"I think the most important issue is... a combination of education and health, then the economics and how we fit into a global economy."

Richard Wolff
Farmington



"I believe in national health care to cover everybody and, of course, the economy to get jobs for everybody."

Lydia Rizzo
Farmington Hills



"Anywhere from eight to 10 million unemployed, and the general economic condition. Charity begins at home."

Jack Hughes
Farmington Hills

The Farmington Observer

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