

School fights

Put problem in perspective

It's time to show some concern about student violence in the Farmington Public Schools. But let's remember to temper that concern with perspective.

Yes, there is a problem with fighting and other violent acts in our schools, not just in the Farmington District, but everywhere.

Make no mistake: All connected with the school community — parents, teachers, officials and especially students — must seriously think about ways of solving this problem.

However, before parental hysteria takes over, let's all remember to put the problem in perspective. The gates of hell aren't going to swing open because a boy got his nose bloodied or a girl got her hair pulled in an isolated incident in a high school hallway somewhere.

Fighting in schools is a problem that has been with us since the days of the one-room schoolhouse.

Sometimes fights happen because of the confining nature of the classroom and school day. Sometimes conflicting cultures are at the root of the problem. But student fights always come about because the parents of the combatants have failed to teach their offspring that fighting in school is unacceptable behavior.

Several Observer stories about student violence have appeared since Joanne LaFleur's son was injured in a fight with another student at Farmington High School on Dec. 8.

All connected with the school community — parents, teachers, officials and especially students — must seriously think about ways of solving this problem.

After the first articles about the altercation — and the threatened lawsuit by LaFleur against the school district — we received many calls from other concerned parents about other student fights and the reaction to them by school officials.

Citizens Against Violence, a new parent group spearheaded by LaFleur, was formed as a result of this recent awareness. The group holds its first meeting 7-9 p.m. this Monday, Feb. 8, at the Farmington Branch Public Library on Liberty.

Allen Martin of Save Our Sons and Daughters (SOSAD) is scheduled to speak. Those with concerns about school violence — and that must include a Farmington school official or two — should attend.

That an outside group (SOSAD) is coming to speak on a school problem shouldn't be taken as criticism of the Farmington school establishment. We've seen how the schools handle these incidents, and we're generally impressed.

But any and all ideas are needed now.

Pay hike anger is justified

Taxpayers are justifiably angered over the arrogance demonstrated by state legislators who gorged themselves on a big helping at the public trough recently when they maneuvered a five-percent pay increase.

Not unlike the bewilderment expressed by inside-the-beltway Washingtonians over the outcry against disgraced attorney general nominee Zoe Baird for flagrantly breaking the law, many in this state's ruling elite are just as surprised at the public distaste over what insiders see as a meager increase.

This open display of gluttony is nothing short of shoving the public's nose in the residue of the feast.

Some legislators are particularly fond these days of telling the public how everyone is going to have to sacrifice in order to get the state financial house back in order.

"We're going to make everyone suffer," bragged State Rep. Lynn Bankes at a recent early morning breakfast. Although voting against the increase, Bankes, like many legislators, is anything but contrite or embarrassed over the raise.

In truth, many legislators who voted against the raise privately believe it is deserved. But the system is rigged so that only a minority have to support it for the raise to take effect.

In short, those in secured districts can take the risk while others can parade about their district, shrugging their shoulders and proclaiming innocence. Added security is in taking the vote at the beginning of a legislative session in the hope angry voters will forget by the next election.

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Our state legislators, like many political leaders in this country today, don't understand the American public's perception of those who are supposed to lead in action as well as in word.

Certainly, nobody begrudges the next guy a five-percent raise — during the good times. But few Michigan taxpayers can even remember the days of a five-percent increase.

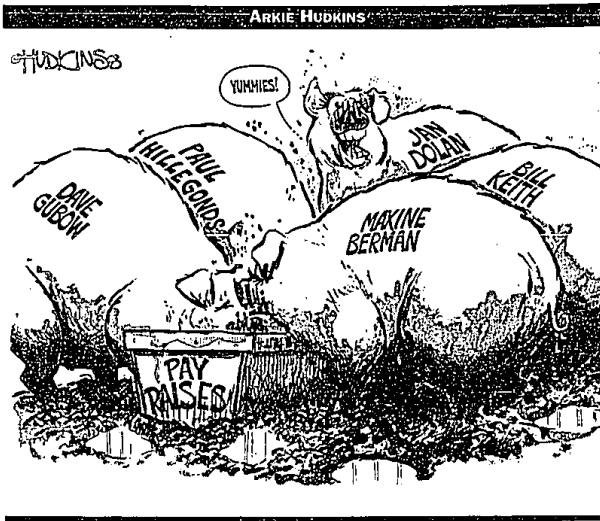
Thousands are unable to remember the last time they received a paycheck, let alone a raise.

For more than a decade, Michigan taxpayers have suffered at the hands of a recession made only worse by inept leadership in both the private and public sectors.

While other states have suffered the ups and downs of the economic cycle, Michigan has sustained an above-average unemployment rate and a lethargic marketplace which sees little hope of improvement.

Many have become hardened to the high numbers which exemplify the exhausted Michigan marketplace.

But the affront demonstrated by our leadership has awakened the public ire. The majority of legislators who gave lip service by voting against the raise should do the honorable thing and donate their raises to charity or risk the consequences — the much dreaded term limitations or even defeat.



LETTERS

Column was great

Thank you, Tom Baer, for your Jan. 25 column which summed up the feelings of a lot of the electorate.

It is said that if you put a million monkeys in front of typewriters, and give them an infinite amount of time, eventually one will write the complete works of Shakespeare.

Give the same monkeys voting booths, and a Clinton-type presidency will eventuate.

In neither case does this prove the intellectual astuteness of the monkeys — only that fate and statistical probability have a wry and capricious sense of humor.

I predict that Clinton's election in 1992 will be seen in retrospect as the "Exxon Valdez" of American politics, a time when the American voters sailed onto the rocks while in search of a safe passage.

When we all realize our error, we will be faced with the fact that it will take a long time to correct the mess that we have brought upon ourselves — an error in judgment that will only compound with time.

Excuse me if I find it exceedingly difficult to accept the admonition of "sacrifice" from a dynamic duo who just threw themselves a \$30 million party. This may make sense to the Buckingham-on-the-Potomac crowd, but it makes little sense to me.

I might remind the Democrats that if the American electorate had realized that the Clinton/Rodham-Clinton stago show was actually a ventriloquist act, there would have been even fewer votes cast for the dummy.

Hillary may be the most intelligent woman on earth, but I still don't remember seeing her name on the ballot. Isn't the idea that we hold an election to choose a president to set policy — did someone change the rules?

When it comes to the issue of credibility, I can only say: "And you thought George Bush lied . . ." An image that comes to mind is the current resident of the White House as "Pinocchio." Enough said.

I hope that at the end of the ride we have received a thorough education in the difference between symbolism and substance.

Richard G. Randolph, Farmington Hills

Tax cut may lead to a shift

Some reflections on Gov. John Engler's State of the State speech, given last week:

Well written and delivered, it may be Engler's best big speech to date. With upbeat emphasis on jobs and economic development, it even sounded like something his predecessor, James Blanchard, might have produced.

With Republicans and Democrats sharing power in the House and the GOP firmly in control of the Senate, Gov. Engler even has a chance of getting some of his ideas enacted.

That's both a promise and a threat, because in his speech Engler reiterated his intention to cut property taxes, unveiling a proposal to cut real estate assessments on which school taxes are based by 20 percent over three years.

Most experts think this plan, if adopted, would cost around \$1 billion in state revenue. This comes on top of this year's budget deficit (\$400 million-plus) and next year's estimated deficit (\$1 billion).

Considering the reductions already made in state services over the past two years, it's reasonable to ask: Where will the added cuts come from? The most likely answer is from "out of formula" school districts, including many served by this newspaper, which receive no state aid to make up for local tax losses.

According to Rick Simonson, lobbyist for the Oakland County Intermediate School District, if assessments were cut from 50 percent to 45 percent of market value in the first year and allowing for inflation, some representative revenue losses would be:

- Birmingham \$5 million.
- Farmington \$5.9 million.
- Rochester \$4.9 million.
- Troy \$5.7 million.
- Walled Lake \$4.7 million.
- West Bloomfield \$2.5 million.

For these districts, already suffering from the "Robin Hood Bill" which diverted revenue increases to poorer districts, such losses could be back-breaking.

Gov. Engler's economic strategy could turn out to be biting the hand that feeds him, as much of his political base rests in precisely the affluent suburbs he proposes to go after. "Talk



PHILIP POWER

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about damaging your own constituency," said William Ballenger, a former GOP state senator and editor of Inside Michigan Politics. "I don't like it," said Sen. David Hopigman, R-West Bloomfield. "It hurts our school districts and doesn't do much for property taxpayers either."

"That was Phase I," said Sen. Mat Dunaski, R-Lake Orion, whose district includes Rochester. "Phase II is maybe one cent of the sales tax."

Plainly, Gov. Engler has some elegant balancing to do between cutting property taxes, alienating his core constituencies and trying to blame somebody else for increasing the sales tax to balance the state's budget.

The facts of the matter, moreover, endorse this approach. No longer a wealthy state, Michigan cannot afford property taxes 30 percent higher than the national average. But in the aggregate, Michigan's total tax burden is about average, so a shift from property tax to sales tax might make economic sense.

Now let's see how the governor and new ungridlocked Legislature manage the politics.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His touchtone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 Ext. 1880.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Should a clock tower be erected near the Masonic Temple in downtown Farmington?

We asked this question at Cowley's Old Village Inn in Farmington.



"I think it'd be cool. The clock in downtown Northville is great."
Kristin Brielmair
Northville



"I think there are other ways they can spend the money."
Mary Cowley
Farmington



"I have good friends on both sides of that issue . . . so I'm kind of on the neutral side."
William Matz
Livonia



"Farmington could use a clock that works."
Craig Grace
Livonia

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TOM BAER, EDITOR, 477-5450

STEVE BARNARD, MANAGING EDITOR

DICK ISHAM, GENERAL MANAGER

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