

The 'C' word

Let's write finis to this feud

Well, lookie here... some excitement has come, ah, creeping back into the Farmington Hills City Council meetings.

It had to happen sooner or later. Council-wise, it's been kind of a tranquil summer, which followed a serene spring, which followed a placid winter. A lot of city business seemed to be getting done efficiently and without rancor in the big room in the big building at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

But then came the Joanne-and-Masha Show of July 19.

It was a feud, sort of, and it was played out before the several who attended the council meeting that evening and to the dozens out there in television land where the meetings are cablecast live.

These days, citizen Masha Silver has a very public bone to pick with councilwoman Joanne Smith over a comment Smith may (or may not) have made about Silver during the council meeting.

Supposedly, Smith called Silver a "creep" in an aside to a fellow council member. The remark, picked up by the colleague's microphone, went out over the cable and into certain homes, where the VCRs are always running on Monday evenings.

Silver, always outspoken and sometimes caustic, was addressing the council and talking down a development issue when Smith allegedly uttered the dreaded "C" word.

Smith denies calling Silver a creep. The videotape reveals a word that sounds something like creep. The city's audio tape is less distinct. Anyway, Silver is now playing the offended citizen for all it's worth. She's luxuriating in

■ This dispute has gone too far. Both parties should shake hands and make up.

Smith's wrath like it's a warm and sudsy bath. She's wearing her martyrdom like a new dress (with matching purse and shoes, of course.)

Now, as much as we'd like to see things stay lively in the Hills, we've got to say that this dispute has gone too far. Both parties should shake hands and make up.

Smith should swallow her pride and tell Silver she's sorry for getting frustrated with her. Hey, we understand frustration. If getting frustrated were a hanging offense, then most of us would be twisting in the wind.

But Smith has to remember that she's a public official and that Silver is a resident who has every right to speak up at the meetings. And it's Smith's duty to listen.

Silver is a self-appointed "council watcher" who attends meetings and speaks up when she sees something she doesn't like. Bless her and all like her for providing that service. All city councils and school boards need watchers. They encourage debate and thought on the issues.

Smith, of all people, should understand that. By her own admission, in her off-council days she spent more than just a few Monday nights in the big room in the big building on 11 Mile as a council watcher, bantering and bickering with those on the other side of the table.

Who knows? She may have even had that dreaded "C" word, or one just as bad, directed at her.

Tax plan is dangerous gamble

Michigan lawmakers have demonstrated that their lust for power far outweighs their concern for the future of education in Michigan.

Last week's vote to ditch the property tax system without a plan to replace funding was an act of irresponsible adolescence. And like teenagers who have misbehaved, these errant legislators should be roundly disciplined for putting their careers before our children's future.

Legislators are acting like gambling casino dealers instead of responsible lawmakers. Since they have chosen to gamble with our educational system they should be put out of office if they lose this bet. This is particularly true for leaders such as Gov. John Engler and wannabe leaders such as Democratic gubernatorial hopeful Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, who sponsored the legislation in the Senate.

We, of course, have some locals, who deserved to be soundly paddled for going along with this ridiculous prank.

For 20 years state politicians have been attempting to foist the property tax monkey off their back. But instead of working out an alternative strategy that makes sense, they have attempted to punish voters because we rejected the carnival-like Proposal A.

Offering a plan that simply shifts taxes from the basically equitable property tax system to other regressive modes, such as sales and income taxes, isn't the answer.

The perceived inequality of property taxes — and that those taxes should not be paid at all — has become stuck in the groove of a broken record, needling the Legislature through 20 years of inaction.

So there was no slow dancing in the state's capitol, when in a quick two-step, first the Sen-

ate, then the House approved the historic SB1, wiping out school operating property taxes — without giving heed to how the money will be replaced.

Unfortunately for taxpayers with children — and those who know them and others who later will employ them — legislators were making all the wrong moves.

Trading gridlock for chaos as they did the limbo last week, legislators cut \$6 billion in local taxes for residential, commercial and industrial property in 1994 in Michigan.

The Legislature had alternatives to quell the noisome qualities of property taxes.

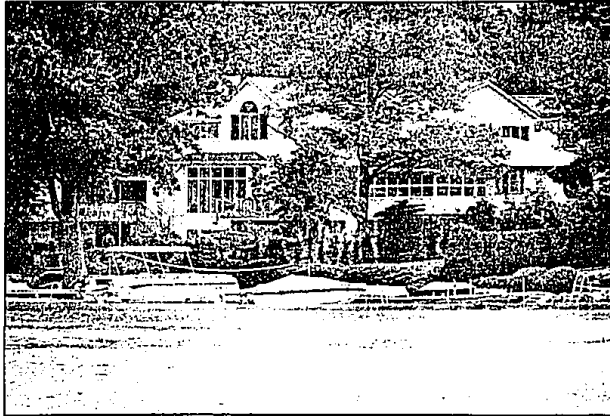
Legislators could have taken steps to assure taxpayers, such as retirees and those on disability, that they wouldn't lose their homes. They also could have made home ownership easier for first time buyers.

Remember state Representative Barbara Dobb, R-Commerce Township, who told a reporter last week that she couldn't wait to get to the floor to vote yes on the bill because that's what she came to Lansing to do. We remind her that the job is only half done, and done irresponsibly unless equitable, substitute funding is found.

Out of the chaos remember as well the voice of state Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham. "The trail, was on the tracks and it's running without brakes," Bouchard said. "... But I'm going to be one loud voice we do not destroy good districts and begin the largest Robin Hood plan we've ever seen."

We're going to hold Bouchard to that, and expect that he lead the way in a bi-partisan effort to pull suburban school districts out of educational limbo.

Back to the future



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Capitol Idea: State legislators passed legislation last week that wiped out property taxes as the major source of funding for public schools in 1994. For Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' position on the plan, see the left side of this page.

LETTERS

'Unacceptable'

As one of many Farmington Hills residents who regularly watch the city council meetings, I was astonished to hear the remark made by councilwoman Joanne Smith about one of our city's citizens at the July 19 meeting.

While it was obvious the remark was not intended to be heard by the listening audience, it was nevertheless clearly heard by many. I find it unacceptable that a citizen cannot express concerns and opinions about city matters without it resulting in a demeaning, personal attack.

Council members are entitled to their personal opinions. This, however, was unquestionably inappropriate behavior in a public forum.

Citizen input should be viewed as a valuable commodity in the decision making process, not as an annoyance.

I think Masha Silver deserves nothing less than a public apology from councilwoman Smith.

Roy A. Lindhardt, Farmington Hills

'No justice'

Isaw something interesting in Farmington a few days ago. At the intersection of Farmington Road and Grand River, I saw two cars turn left after the light had turned red.

Behind them was a police car. The policeman did nothing about this illegal act. Very, very strange.

Here's why: A few months ago I made that same turn, but the light didn't turn red until after I started my turn. Upon safely completing my turn, I was pursued by one of Farmington's finest.

He made a dangerous U-turn in the intersection, chased me down and gave me a ticket. Now, I would never suggest that the Farmington police are arbitrary and inconsistent in their enforcement of the law. And I would never suggest that they have nothing better to do than harass and intimidate safe drivers. So I just don't understand it.

I can only conclude that there is no such thing as justice in Farmington.

Roger F. Hane, Southfield

It's a 'sham'

Last week bi-partisan Legislative decision to scuttle property tax funding for public schools in Michigan seems to be based on two popular notions: the inherent unfairness of property taxes and the need for educational reform.

In the aftermath of this overwhelming endorsement of change, some politicians and columnists have lambasted the property tax and welcomed a chance to do something finally about "quality" in education, as Gov. John Engler puts it, or "establish a committee" (for study and recommendations) as Sen. Debbie Stabenow said.

So far, editors and politicians have kept their distance from what the new taxes will be, what they will cost and who will pay them.

Instead, they champion "vouchers," "empowerment," and "choice," while claiming the real public enemy to educational opportunity is the union teacher and his/her organization (Michigan Education Association).

This is a scam, and I've seen it before. Where is the proof that the new taxes will be less burdensome than the old, particularly on those least able to pay?

How will the showy, cheap solutions (vouchers, etc.) actually solve complex school and societal problems?

Why introduce shop-worn scapegoating of teachers and unions into the serious, complicated issue of school financing?

It is not surprising that the public distrusts politicians. Many are sly and cunning, some stupid.

It is therefore important to recognize courage and vision when we see it. Sen. Jack Faxon and our other legislators voted against the bill.

Lawrence Niblett, Farmington Hills

Yea Pirates!

North Farmington-West Bloomfield baseball is over for the year, but memories of a great season still remain.

Too often we hear the down-side of organized baseball, and NFWB in particular. This year provided only positive experiences for our family and all the other families who were fortunate enough to have their sons drafted onto the Pirates, a Division C Mustang team.

The Pirates were coached and managed by Jeff Jaffe and Steve Shumer. These two dedicated fathers encouraged the boys both on and off the field. They taught them baseball skills, the value of good sportsmanship and the benefits of teamwork.

They helped develop a feeling in each player that he was an important contributor to the Pirates, regardless of his place in the batting order or the position he played. It is this very attitude that carried this team to a winning season and Division C championship.

In addition to the positive experience gained by the boys, having a child playing for the Pirates also provided an opportunity for supportive parents and other family members to enjoy good baseball and make new friends.

It became a Wednesday night ritual to share dinner at the games. Many memorable times were spent around the grill, and there was always enough food for whoever showed up, including the fans for opposing teams.

Rumor has it teams looked forward to playing the Pirates, regardless of the outcome of the games. On Saturdays there were always bagels or doughnuts for hungry and enthusiastic fans.

NFWB baseball may be over, but it is not forgotten. This was a season of everything that's good about kids playing organized baseball. Three cheers for the Division C champs, the Pirates, the coaches, the kids and the fans.

Maxine Graf Goodman, Neil H. Goodman, Farmington Hills

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Any thoughts on the \$15.5 million bond issues for a new library that Farmington-area voters will decide on Aug. 10?

We asked this question at the Farmington branch Library.



'I would probably vote yes. I'll have to read more about it.'

Gina Dehl
Farmington



'I got the thing they sent in the mail, but I haven't thought much about it.'

Alan Kruck
Farmington



'I'm for it. The community is growing and the libraries aren't big enough.'

Pat Foley
Farmington Hills



'I'm aware of it now. I hadn't heard a thing about it.'

Judah Kosterman
Farmington

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