

POINTS OF VIEW

Democratic process applies to education, too

I would like to add my comments to those presented several times recently in the Observer regarding traditional versus innovative education.

What I view as the actual problem is that we have an administration that has difficulty when there is a parent group that disagrees with its way of thinking.

The board makes sure that members agree on everything, and those who don't are gradually moved out in favor of others who will, or at least change their vote by the end of the board meeting — as was done recently.

What is always implied when there is disagreement is that the differing person just doesn't understand the concept. This is what was said to Doug Swiatkowski, who heads the parent group in favor of traditional education.

Arrogant thinking

Well, this is a pretty arrogant way of thinking. It just doesn't work in a community like Farmington or Farmington Hills.

Or worse yet, the person is labeled as a rabble-rouser. The response from the school itself, from the administration, to the board to Superintendent Michael Flanagan, becomes even less constructive.

When I campaigned during the last

school board election, I spoke about the board's not listening and responding to parents and taxpayers.

It is obvious we are going to have another year of the same. As long as this district continues to elect people who are supported by the board, we are never going to have constructive differences of opinion on the board itself. The vote for every issue is always going to be 7-0.

Leave or change schools

Parents with very legitimate concerns have little to no chance of getting anywhere. Their only solutions are to move out of this community or place their children in private schools. I know several people who have done just that.

In regard to the issue itself, there is no reason that this district cannot emphasize traditional education, as well as incorporate some innovative programs.

As I have stated repeatedly, these programs need to be well-researched and re-evaluated frequently. The school administration would do well to remember the basic concept that what works for one child does not necessarily work for another.

The possibility of different types of curriculum for the variable needs of the children should be considered, and not

QUEST COLUMNIST



SUSAN MCKENDRICK

just at places like Highmeadow, where enrollment is severely limited and kids are selected not by testing, as they should be, but by lottery or the sibling clause.

I have also noticed that every time there was a school committee that investigated an issue favored by the administration, there were "overwhelming" numbers of members who supported it.

However, when there were disagreements, there were "only a few." Well, the committee members are selected because they already support the issue.

Those who don't support it are either not made aware of the upcoming decision or don't speak out for fear of being too much in the public eye.

Some of these issues should be put to a vote, and not the usual unanimous

board vote, but the vote of all the parents of the school children. You might be surprised by what you get.

Still in public school

And before I am misunderstood, let me place it on the record that I have kept my son in Farmington Public Schools because I believe he can obtain a quality education.

He has had excellent teachers and has received the benefits of many innovative programs. He is an exemplary student and was also in the Delta program in elementary school.

I am in favor of hands-on techniques, but there is definitely a time and place for rote memorization. How else are they to learn the multiplication tables and remember them for years to come without having to think twice?

My son's ability to memorize is why, for him, inventive spelling does not work. Once the word was spelled wrong and not corrected, that is how he memorized it.

We're still reprogramming words that in his brain are meant about to be. Also, he needed the B or C to make him want to strive for the A, and that was his goal, not his parents'. We are happy with his doing his best, whatever that might be.

These are just a few examples of how certain innovative programs just do not

work for some children. The parents should have some choice in the type of curriculum provided to their children.

You must listen

I would like to state to the members of the board of education that what I stood for while campaigning and what I still say is that you need to listen to everyone in the community, even if they don't always agree with you, and find a way to negotiate and compromise.

That is what this democratic process is supposed to be all about. There are always two sides to an issue, both with merit, and often there is a way to please everyone.

Offending intelligent people is not the answer.

And Mr. Flanagan, you need to understand that it is the job and duty of the reporters and editor of the Farmington Observer to report these controversial issues and make headlines out of them.

After all, they are in the business of selling newspapers, and I, for one, find this very interesting reading.

Susan McKendrick, a Farmington Hills resident, was an unsuccessful candidate for the Farmington Board of Education last June. She finished third with 988 votes.

LETTERS

What wasn't said

The opening paragraph by your guest columnist, Mark Steckloff, on Aug. 12 reads: "The newly enacted Clinton budget plan will reduce the federal budget deficit by nearly \$500 billion without raising income taxes of middle class Americans one penny."

He continues that the fulminations of various self-styled fiscal conservatives denouncing the plan may be colorful but are dead wrong, in fact they are fabrications he quaintly termed "political lies."

What the writer doesn't say is that the plan assumes (this country's pro-

duction) will grow at a compound rate of about 4 percent per year starting with this year. However the growth rate in 1993 has only been about 1 percent and unless there is some sort of miracle in August and September it will not be much higher for the full fiscal year. That means the plan is in trouble even before it takes effect on Oct. 1.

What the writer also doesn't say is that the present federal debt (the sum of annual budget deficits) is now about \$4.3 trillion and at the conclusion of the plan (if all goes well) it will increase by about \$1.1 trillion.

The details of this increase were outlined in the Aug. 4, 1993 issue of the Wall Street Journal and other media and (reluctantly) concurred to by the

administration and Congressional leaders. Guess what? Instead it increased by double that amount. Talk about political lies.

The guest columnist concludes that the Clinton/Congressional budget plan is precisely the kind of change Americans voted for last November. Not this voter.

What this voter (and I hope all American voters) needs is that the tax-and-spend liberal Democrats are voted out of office; term limitations are imposed on both houses of Congress and a balanced budget amendment is in place.

Maybe then the political lies will end.

Kenneth P. Dorocak, Farmington Hills

It's a bad ad

I've always been touched by the ads placed that depict starving pets who need help and homes, but the enclosed ad (showing a man about to beat his dog) by the Michigan Anti-Cruelty Society is repulsive.

It upsets me, and I'm sure I'm not the only person who doesn't care to see this type of advertising.

Certainly it happens, but for the most part it's not the typical type of abuse going on with household pets. Most abused pets are running the streets with no home or being starved

and neglected, not beaten with a baseball bat in a basement by a frustrated owner.

This ad stinks.

It doesn't move me to send a donation, only to tell you we don't need this type of garbage in our newspaper. Maybe you're not getting enough donations with your ads showing starving dogs, but in the future I'd hope you would run more tasteful advertising than this. Someone should take a bat to the person who approved this ad and knock some sense into him.

I'm very disappointed in your ethics, and again, when I see the hungry pets I'm more likely to send you off a check. Keep up your efforts, but clean up your advertising. More people will respond. Karen Miller, Farmington Hills

There's a slew of folks who 'just don't get it'

So, I was sitting in an Upper Peninsula bar with visions of brook trout rising to a dry fly and sipping on something much wetter. It was vacation time. No schools, teachers or most of all school millages to think about. My conversation with the guy sitting next to me was about trout, but his was about the local school superintendent.

It seems that in the small district, about 80 kids in all, the superintendent "walks around wearing a blue three piece suit, makes \$50,000 a year and won't teach a class."

It got me to thinking about people who "just don't get it," people like Richard Nixon, who just didn't get it that people wanted a bit more honesty out of a president than one who lied about a break-in and had a vice president who was on the take.

Nixon was the classic "just didn't get it" guy. But there are more. There's the school superintendent in the Upper Peninsula. All the guy has to do is take off the blue suit and teach an English class. It would be cheap job insurance.

But there are others. Here's a list of don't get it folks:

■ The Plymouth Canton school board and administration didn't understand that voters wanted an acknowledgment they cast their ballots against a 4 mill property tax increase in June. It didn't happen, so voters tried to send them a message again on Tuesday and rejected the same millage. The jury is still out deciding if these guys got it or not.

■ Auto executives who get free cars and then wonder why the public isn't beating down the dealership doors to buy new ones. These guys ought to be forced to pay the full sticker price for every car they buy. Give the free ones to the auto workers. If auto executives bought their own cars, they just may get the reason why cars aren't selling.

■ The same should be done for all public employees such as city managers and school superintendents. In the Plymouth Canton school district, the superintendent gets a car, a Cadillac. He makes up the difference in price between it and a Ford. But the real point isn't that he's



JEFF COUNTS

paying part of the cost. He, like other public employees, should be buying their own cars. It's a lot easier to ask the public to come up with an extra \$200 to \$400 a year when you don't even have to pay for your own car.

■ Guys in their 40s who are still wearing pony tails and earrings. There comes a time when you just have to grow up and become an adult. Personally, I have this urge to clip them off guys who are balding on the top and graying at the sides.

■ Men who push around strollers with babies. Face it, you look silly. It's mom's job. It's real easy to break the addiction. Simply hand over the stroller to her, dust off the golf clubs, lawn mower, fly rod, shotgun, water skis and get out of the house on Saturday.

■ Men and women who wear power suits. The 1980s are over and you look like a geek in them. Bite the bullet and send them to the Salvation Army where perhaps they will be picked up by one of the homeless who will then be empowered by the garment and go out and get a job.

Now that we've identified the "just don't get it crowd," you'd think there would be some hope that these folks would get smart. But chances are that won't happen.

It's like the guy who continues to wear white socks when dressed in a suit. Nobody quite has the guts to tell him it looks stupid, and he's too out of it to notice the rest of the world.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers and "just doesn't get it" that we're living in the 1990s, not the 1890s. He can be reached at 469-2700.

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