

## Approve waiver

### Residents can restore losses

In less than a week, voters in the Clarenceville School District, which includes the southeast corner of Farmington Hills, will decide whether to let school taxes rise faster than the rate of inflation by waiving the tax rollback as required by the Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment to the Michigan Constitution.

The election is scheduled on Monday, Oct. 4. Because a Headlee waiver will result in higher taxes, that's exactly what the ballot language will propose — to restore taxes by increasing the limit of the levy that can be collected.

The Observer recommends a YES vote on the waiver proposal because the increase will be less than 1 mill, collected for one year, and will prevent serious program cuts next semester without providing extra money for contract negotiations.

The proposal would increase the district's levy by 0.9872 mills (almost 99 cents per \$1,000 State Equalized Valuation) for a total operational levy of 41.33 mills. The waiver, if approved, would give Clarenceville an additional \$231,549.

The additional cost to residents in the district would be about \$29 a year for the owner of a \$60,000 house, about \$39 a year for the owner of a \$80,000 house, and almost \$49 a year for the owner of a \$100,000 house. If the waiver request is defeated, the homeowners would save these same amounts.

The district wants the additional income because of three circumstances beyond the control of the administration and school board. First, the Michigan Legislature during the past two years has taken away adult education income of \$435,000 — an average of \$217,500 annually. Last month the Michigan Legislature ordered Clarenceville to pay \$150,000 in FICA (Social

Security) costs that the state paid last year. Finally, when General Motors won a property assessment appeal in Pontiac, the Oakland Intermediate District lost \$5 million in income and spread the cost among all its member districts, of which Clarenceville is one. Clarenceville's share of the cost was \$87,000.

The income loss and added FICA and bill-back costs for one year total \$454,500. Obviously, approval of the waiver won't make up the shortfall. The rest will come from the reserve fund and maintaining budget cuts already instituted.

If the waiver is defeated, six teachers now on a one-semester contract will be laid off to cut \$181,500 from the budget, and other cuts will be instituted. The results will be cuts in the early childhood program and the likelihood of reducing the middle school day from seven periods to six periods.

The Headlee Amendment requires school districts to reduce its operating tax rate whenever property values increase faster than inflation. The reduction ensures that taxes go up no faster than the rate of inflation — without a vote of the taxpayers.

To keep the tax rate the same as last year, local taxpayers must say OK by voting to waive the Headlee rollback requirements.

The Observer urges a yes vote on Oct. 4 because the increase is just \$3 to \$4 a month, because the increase is only for one year, because the loss of income is not Clarenceville's fault, and because the additional income will be used only to retain programs. Passage also gets Clarenceville through the next fiscal year and will provide stability while Lansing comes up with a financing alternative(s) to the property tax.

## Special groups seek vouchers

The worst school reform idea floating around Michigan these days is called "voucher." Under it, state school aid would "follow the pupil" to his or her choice of school — local public, neighboring private, or church-related school.

The voucher plan is not to be confused with "schools of choice," a concept limited to public schools. The voucher plan would mean a breakthrough for special interests who long have lusted to get their hands on taxpayer dollars.

Michigan voters in 1970 said no to the voucher plan, then called "parochialism," by a firm 3-2 margin. At that time, voters amended the constitution, flatly prohibiting state aid to non-public schools. The voucher interests tried again in 1978 and were gunned down by a more emphatic 3-1 margin.

They're at it again with a new theme. Instead of a raid on our tax dollars, they're calling it "competition" — that is, making public schools compete for students with private schools.

The chief tactic is a non-stop, vitriolic attack on public education — state curriculum laws, superintendents and especially the teachers.

There are many other reasons the bubble about "voucher" ought to be halted:

■ Voucher is a Trojan horse for any zany cult that wants to indoctrinate kids with an ethnocentric curriculum or bigoted idea about religion.

■ Under a voucher system, we'll see an explosion of spending on colorful brochures, TV ads

and billboards to lure kids from one school to another. They call it "marketing," but we call it wasteful hype.

■ Private schools always can demonstrate good results by skimming off the best applicants and leaving the problem cases to public schools.

■ Private schools can admit the affluent who are able to supplement state vouchers with private bankrolls. Poorer kids can be left out — and will have fewer dollars in their public schools.

The high pressure for a voucher system comes at a bad time for Michigan schools — just as they are making breakthroughs in accountability (annual reports), state-endorsed diplomas, testing in problem-solving rather than multiple-choice guesswork, better tenure laws.

There always will be a place for private and church-related schools. Michigan protects their right to exist, their free speech, their tax-free status, their building safety and their zoning status.

Michigan was 26th of the 50 states to be admitted to the Union but first to declare a free education as a right and to make providing that education a legislative responsibility. Ours is a proud, practical and patriotic tradition. Those who use slick code words like "voucher" and "competition" would do education more harm than good.

## Will it work?



**Funding plan:** On Tuesday Gov. John Engler will announce his new plan for funding education, which is said to no longer include a voucher plan. But recent events left him besieged by reporters and guests at this week's Canton Economic Club meeting. For our view of voucher systems, see our editorial on this page.

## Unemployment solutions

Currently the policy is that teachers must be notified 60 days prior to the end of the school year if they are going to be laid off. They can begin collecting unemployment at the end of the school year.

If they are hired back or get another full-time position in the fall, they get three months of unemployment that is basically a bonus. This is wrong.

With the unsettled condition of school financing, this could be a costly problem in the spring when a large number of teachers could be laid off. This would have a negative effect on Farmington finances because our unemployment is self financing. Both local teacher contracts and state laws should be changed to eliminate this inequity.

**Possible solutions:**  
■ Pay all teacher salaries on a 12-month basis with unemployment starting on the first day of the new year when unemployment really starts.  
■ Change the state law so teachers collect unemployment compensation at the start of the new year when unemployment really starts not at the end of the current year when unemployment now starts.

■ Let teachers collect unemployment as they currently do, but change the state law and have the teachers repay unemployment if they get a full-time job in the fall. In the '80s auto workers had to repay TRA money they received when they returned to work.

I realize teacher unemployment compensation is a complex and emotional issue and my suggestions are not complete but something should be done. I don't want to continue hearing about teachers collecting unemployment and then going back to work full time in the fall.

I would like something initiated at the state level and in local teacher contracts to avoid this overpayment in the future. Please direct updates to the undersigned.

Bill Stuber, Farmington Hills

## Health care sacrifice

The Clinton Health Plan should be called what it really is: The Sacrificial Health Plan. There are sacrifices in it for everyone: for both doctors and patients; for rich, poor, and middle class; for big companies and little ones; and yes, even for insurance companies.

This is not said facetiously. I think it's a great idea. The egalitarian approach. Democracy at its best. Everybody pays and everybody benefits. Medical care for everyone, but with constraints.

Nobody gets it for free unless they're destitute. Everyone contributes something. Incentives to stay healthy. A new focus on prevention. A willingness on everyone's part to contribute a little something for the health of others. Pay something now to prevent those quarter-million-dollar premature babies with a quarter's worth of prenatal care.

Yes to free condoms to anyone who asks. Yes to rationing. Let's all contribute to the debate, but then agree to some rational ground rules, and then live by them when it's our turn to be

refused heroic measures. Does it make sense to spend \$2 million on 2,000 MRI head scans when they turn up only one aneurysm that medicine can do anything for? Is your headache worth \$2 million? Mine isn't.

So let's get on with the debate. Let your congressional people know what you feel, yes, but more importantly, pressure them to act.

Eugene Sprow, Farmington Hills

## Speaking out

In 1965, I was opposed to the war in Vietnam. In 1989, I was opposed to the cancellation of the on-site senior citizen adult education classes. In 1993, I am opposed to an eight foot wide concrete bike path being carved out through the lovely vistas along Farmington Road.

In the first cause, politicians knew "right" was on their side, and thousands of innocent people died. In the second cause, the Farmington Board of Education killed the dreams of senior residents who only wanted a high school diploma.

In the third cause, not only will the natural beauty of the area be destroyed, but forcing youngsters to cross busy Farmington Road at the Heritage Park entrance will endanger their lives.

To label Farmington Road area residents "cantankerous ones" in the Observer's Sept. 23 editorial because they verbalized their dissenting opinions at a recent city council meeting is certainly offensive to anyone who believes in the First Amendment right of free speech.

In addition, "The Attitude" of these citizens, many who are elderly, simply reflects their appreciation and dedication to the natural beauty of the area, as well as their concern for the safety of those who will use this proposed bike path.

Agreeing with the majority does not make an issue correct, nor does agreeing with a political body make an issue right. Perhaps the editor of the Farmington Observer has failed to learn the history of Farmington and about the values of the Quaker settlers. Their opposition to slavery was contrary to the position of many people and to that of the government.

Today, we are proud of the efforts of these individuals who stood up for their beliefs. Would these founding fathers and mothers of our community be considered "cantankerous" and possessing an "attitude" for taking an unpopular position?

Perhaps if the city council were more concerned with the citizens and not looking toward the November 2 election, the residents of Farmington Hills would also be better informed about the safety hazards and difficulties associated with the proposed bike path.

Instead of informing the citizens, it now appears that a concerted public relations effort is being undertaken to quiet a vocal minority.

However, this individual will not be silenced by a poorly informed city editor or uncaring politicians who wish the issues of ecology and safety would be silenced until a concrete blight has been laid on top of the lovely lush landscapes and little children are forced to run for their lives across busy Farmington Road.

Joannie E. Allen, Farmington Hills

## COMMUNITY VOICE

### QUESTION:

What's your opinion on national health care?

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



"I think it's a good thing. You'll probably have to make some changes in it. I think it will pass."  
Gene Wilkerson  
Farmington Hills



"The government is going to pay for it. The government is us and we're going to end up paying for it in the long run."  
Albert Roo  
Farmington



"I'm all for it. It will take time to get it down to where we're really efficient. We're the only major country that doesn't have national medicine."  
Milton Ballin  
Farmington



"When an employee gets closer to retirement age, they start to pressure him with buyout packages to save the costs of future health care benefits."  
Mary LaCroix  
Northville

## The Farmington Observer

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