

# Headlee from page 1A

## 'Halo and huff'

Just ask those in Farmington Public Schools, which has earned Headlee's halo and huff. The district, which has the distinction of having a tax crusader living and working in its back yard, had a bond issue in 1988 and a millage increase in 1991 shot down.

Headlee, along with Alexander Hamilton's outgoing vice president Patrick Anderson, questioned the merits of both.

By coincidence, Headlee backed the district's request for a millage renewal earlier this year. That passed by a 4-to-1 margin.

Opposition to just millage requests has been justified, he said. He pointed out the Farmington district had \$12 million in surplus, not to mention receiving \$3 million in the sale of property to Little Caesars at the time.

The sale wasn't included in the district's annual report, he said. "They said it was an oversight," said Headlee, recalling the school board meeting six years ago. "The accountant was there. I can see how you might lose a school bus or two, but I can't hardly see how you could lose a (\$3 million) piece of property.

"Here they had the arrogance . . . they thought the end was so important that the means of deceiving the people of this school district was OK." To be branded as anti-education stings, though. All nine of his children went to public schools, many of them in the Farmington district. He's proud of that.

## Seeing both sides

Farmington superintendent Michael Flanagan said having Headlee in the background was intimidating five years ago. Since then, he's seen him in another light.

"I think in the beginning he had some concerns with the schools, but I think you'll find he doesn't now," Flanagan said. "Even though we disagree occasionally on some issues, I think he's a decent man."

"I've watched him at Hillside (Elementary School in Farmington Hills) with young children, and I think that's a side most people don't see."

The Headlee Amendment has a hidden benefit in that it guarantees a percentage of the state budget going toward education, Flanagan said.

Headlee also points out that it was he who insisted an inflationary increase be included in his 1978 amendment for school districts to keep up with the cost of living. Other tax-cut advocates

wanted districts to beg for every dime.

Also, Headlee wanted the amendment to include an option for an override, when approved by the voters.

All he wanted, is for taxpayers to have a say.

## Officials scowled

Yet school officials scowled and the MEA mounted a campaign to fight the legislation. Headlee said the League of Women Voters had already taken a stance on it, which he believes was the work of the teachers union.

Headlee bears no malice or ill will toward those who oppose him. Behind a grand wooden desk in office, he says what he thinks, which in this day of political correctness is akin to playing Hacky-sack with a live grenade.

For the native of Fort Dodge, Iowa, there's no other way.

The son of a gypsum plant manager, Headlee earned a degree in business and speech from Utah State University. After graduation, he served in the U.S. Army as a lieutenant.

He moved to Michigan in the mid-1960s, working for Burroughs Corp. He became a Mormon and began working with then-Gov. George Romney's presidential campaign.

"Although I lived in Utah, there were too many Mormons there," said Headlee, who has twice served as bishop.

## Austerity program

When Headlee took over as president of Alexander Hamilton, the company was losing money and posted \$141 million in assets in 1972.

More than 20 years later, assets are \$7 billion and pre-tax earnings are estimated at \$111.6 million for this year.

He implemented an austerity program: the executive dining room was closed, executive salaries cut and staff pared from 220 to 110. His predecessor made \$125,000 a year; Headlee set his salary at \$45,000.

His campaign for governor in 1985 also bore the hallmarks of a back-to-basics approach. Upsetting then-Lt. Gov. James Brickley in the Republican primary and two others (L. Brooks Patterson and state Sen. Jack Wellborn), Headlee lost to James Whitbeck by 200,000 votes in the general election.

The campaign had a note of controversy. Headlee stated in a radio interview that a platform endorsing homosexual marriages and adoption was "kinky."

The platform was adopted by the Women's Task Force, which included Helen Milliken, wife of then-Gov. William Milliken. By the time the quote made the rounds, opponents had twisted the statement into having Headlee saying Helen Milliken was "kinky."

"It is still a kinky proposal," said Headlee, more than 10 years later. "By any other name, it is still a kinky proposal. Get a copy of that and read it and see if I ought to apologize."

That statement along with his stands on abortion, had the black hat being placed on his head by interest groups. He doesn't believe that hurt his campaign, though.

What did him in against Blanchard, he said, were high unemployment figures released during the campaign and low approval ratings for Republican office holders President Ronald Reagan and Milliken. Unemployment was 17 percent statewide and 40 percent among black teens.

As a result, Blanchard swept more than 90 percent of the vote in Detroit.

"I had no resentment towards the black community," Headlee said. "I wouldn't have voted for a Republican either in that environment."

And if he'd been elected governor and been successful with turning the state around? Said Headlee without hesitation, "I'd probably been president."

He thinks about one more foray into politics. He considered a run for Don Riegle's U.S. Senate seat, running on taxes and on "decency issues" such as pornography and gay rights.

"I don't think we should treat people who have perverted lifestyles unfairly," he said, "but I don't think they should get special rights."

Added Headlee about political life: "As soon as you announce as a Republican or Democrat, immediately the volleys start coming regarding your intentions and your motives. Since I don't seek power, I seek ways to serve. I can serve as a citizen."

He'll spend his newly acquired free time with his wife, Mary, and 39 grandchildren. Health-wise, Headlee said he feels great. He had a heart transplant in 1987, but still plays tennis and golf and teaches Sunday school.

His fondness of poetry and inspirational sayings is borne out in a collection, which he gives to visitors.

"The Lord has been very good to me," he said.



Richard Headlee speaks: "Everything that comes out of there (the state Legislature) is poorly done."

# Headlee says where he stands

Richard Headlee, who is stepping down as president of Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of America, is not known for side-stepping issues.

Here are some of his views on people, places and things.

State Legislature's eliminating property taxes to fund public schools without having a plan for replacement revenue in place:

"I've never seen the Legislature do anything responsible. It's partly responsible or partly irresponsible. In terms of being totally responsible, it's not. Everything that comes out of there is poorly done."

(Headlee favors term limitations and part-time legislators.)

The concept of charter schools:

"If someone is competing with them for those students, and those students don't have to go there, I think there's a little edge."

"If people had to buy their life insurance from me, do you think I'd be as pleasant and as sweet as I am? I'd like to think so, but it wouldn't be true. I'd act like a business man. It's no different than the rest of them."

What he would've done when Kalkaska Public Schools shut down after running out of money:

"I would have made an example of them. I would've fired the teachers. I would've taken the district over, and I would've taught the MEA a lesson. Once again, it's this arrangement of public officials holding people hostage."

What the Farmington Board



Richard Headlee

of Education should look for in a new superintendent: "A guy like (Michael) Flanagan."

# Hunt up holiday spirit on Saturday

## Related editorial, 20A

The holiday spirit comes to downtown Farmington with the second annual "Holiday Hunting" event on Saturday, Dec. 4. Accompanied by the Farmington High School Marching Band, Santa makes his appearance by helicopter, landing at 11 a.m.

Last year's landing drew more than 500 people to the downtown parking lot.

Developed as a family, multicultural event, Holiday Hunting celebrates December holidays around the world through performances under the tent and throughout the downtown, educational activities and a "treasure hunt" from store to store.

Children will receive activity sheets and trinkets relating to a particular holiday from participating merchants.

In addition to their traditional

## The Holiday Hunting coordinators are encouraging attendees to bring their holiday packages to the downtown tent.

craft activity, the library is sponsoring an art and writing contest called Holiday Expressions. Farmington students of all ages are encouraged to depict an interesting aspect of a holiday from around the world through story, poetry, painting, or other artistic medium.

Files with more detailed information are available at both library branches. Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony just prior to the Caroling Party at the library on Dec. 20.

The Holiday Hunting coordinators are encouraging attendees to bring their holiday packages to

the downtown tent to help support Team Farmington and the Farmington Area Special Olympics.

Volunteer physically and mentally challenged teens and young adults will be on hand to wrap gifts for a nominal donation toward Special Olympics. In honor of the true spirit of the season, donations of canned food can be made at the Civic Theater while attending a free movie compliments of Metrobank. The movie, "A Christmas Story" will be shown at no charge at 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. Saturday.

Pick up a flier at the library for a complete listing of activities. There will also be an information desk available under the tent on event day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. To make parking easier, a Victorian Trolley will be making the rounds throughout the downtown from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. All events are free to the public.

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