

POINTS OF VIEW

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
How can we improve voter turnout?

We asked this question of election workers at Precinct 2 at North Farmington High School.



"You shouldn't have to encourage it. It's our civic duty."
Frances Crimaldi



"I think we're doing it right now. Maybe a computer for us to look up names."
Shirley Rosenberg



"Computerized voting."
Homer Hall



"Online voting. They do Saturdays in South Carolina. Maybe Saturdays or holidays."
Gale Stieners

MORE LETTERS

Who's the scammer?

After receiving my last phone bill I will be spending more of my time trying to stop Washington from scamming me.

On my phone bill I have charges that I have paid taxes to take care of:

■ The federal taxes should provide citizens with sufficient funds to cover their phone bills or take them away. Don't charge me another fee on my phone bill and call it "other charges." Washington is providing more loop holes to add more to my expenses and not allowing me to get credit for it because they don't call it a tax. Whoowwwwee!

■ FCC and/or "National Access Fee" for schools or Internet expenses are or should be covered under the school tax, state and federal so - scrap this idea; just another scam! Who comes up with these ideas some traitor or communist? These are good ways to wreck our country.

I learned in school that eg: 1 cent times 100 equals \$1. I'm a senior and on a limited income maybe others are pound foolish but I don't want someone's thumb on my scale when they spend my money.

God put me on this earth for a purpose not to spend money foolishly. We need a lot more of God in our schools or we don't have them for very long.

George Stelczuk
Farmington

The bum's rush

In view of the massive influence of money in elections through special interest lobbyists and political action committees, why won't state Rep. Raczkowski accept challenger Aldo Vognorzi's proposal to voluntary limit spending in their race to \$25,000 and to not accept contributions from special interest PACs?

Mr. Raczkowski has collected thousands of dollars from special interest lobbyists because he responds to their will such as fronting for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce on House Bill 4777, co-sponsored by the state representative, that would take away present local authority in many areas including the control of billboards and other signs, prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to minors, enforcing a strong local ordinance against oil drilling in residential areas and many others.

In Farmington and Farmington Hills it is possible to carry on an effective campaign by spending no more than \$25,000. Come on Mr. Raczkowski strike a blow for returning election financing to the people. Agree to a \$25,000 limit on campaign spending and give the special interest lobbying PACs the bum's rush.

Ryan J. Gesund
Farmington Hills

Assessment practices have helped contribute to sprawl

One of the largest contributors to "sprawl" - low density, uncontrolled, wholesale development, often in rural areas - is a perverse part of the Michigan tax code that requires land to be assessed at its "highest and best use." In practice, this means that rural land that has been farmed for years is often assessed as though it were going to be sold for residential development tomorrow.

This has saddled Michigan farmers, already facing the worst economic times in a decade, with unfairly high taxes that can force them to sell their land and quit farming. Result? Development; sometimes sprawling.

This is not a problem encountered by only a few agricultural malcontents. Over the past 15 years, something like 1.2 million acres of farmland has gone out of production in Michigan, a not insubstantial blow to agriculture, at \$4 billion per year the second largest industry in Michigan.

Of all politicians presently on the scene, Gov. John Engler, who grew up on a farm, is the best qualified to address this problem.

In a plan announced last week at the Michigan Farm Bureau convention, Engler proposed:

■ Farmland would be assessed on the land's present economic value for farming, not on its potential value if developed.

■ Enacting this proposal would require amending the Michigan Constitution, and so would need a two-thirds vote in the Legislature to get on the statewide ballot.

■ If farmland under production but with reduced taxes were to be sold for development, the selling farmer would pay back the tax break he had received for the past seven years.

■ This money would go into an Agricultural Preservation Fund, to be used to buy development rights from farmers willing to sell them. In effect, farmers who choose to sell development rights would continue to own and farm their land, but would have sold off the option of developing it.

A key part of the plan is repayment of the tax break if farmland is developed. Otherwise, all the tax break would do is encourage



PHILIP POWER

land speculation schemes. In some states where farmland is taxed at a reduced rate, developers reap the tax break for themselves by reeling land to farmers, thereby reducing the carrying cost of land fated for ultimate development.

As is the case with most sensible proposals, Engler's farmland preservation proposal has a cost. Taxing agricultural land at its actual value as a farm would cost state and local governments something like \$90 million each year. The Senate Fiscal Agency estimates that local governments and school districts would be hardest hit, absorbing \$67 million of the reduced revenue stream.

And you may expect to hear from various folks - the Michigan Townships Association in first place - who consider their particular ox a target for goring.

Others, however, are saner in their reactions. "It's a good way to go," said a spokesman for the Farm Bureau. "Sprawl ends up paying to protect farmland." And Lee Schwarz, a lobbyist for the Michigan Association of Homebuilders, argues the program would save farmland by making farming profitable. "It's idiotic to tax farmland as though you were building condominiums on it," he says.

At the end of the day it's plain that serious distortions in land use have arisen from the ways in which agricultural land in Michigan is assessed. Right now, all the incentives favor converting perfectly productive farmland into subdivisions.

Engler's proposal deserves passage by the Legislature and adoption by the voters of Michigan.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net

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