

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

New diversity effort needs local support, volunteers

Community leaders are taking an important step forward as they look to expand the scope and direction of the Multicultural Multiracial Community Council.

Formed in response to racial issues in Farmington schools, the council has flourished in recent years — not in the dedication of its leadership, but in attendance at events and seminars. While hundreds have attended the annual Heritage Festivals and Martin Luther King Jr. Day remembrances, only a handful of attendees showed up for programs geared toward parents and business owners.

Part of the problem is simply societal: adults, teens and children are busier than they've ever been. Parents cart kids to lessons, sports and concerts, fitting in family time somewhere between work and activities. Business owners, particularly those in smaller companies, are working harder than ever as the economy forces cutbacks.

The council also battles an increasingly insular world, where families keep in touch via email and internet access allows us to elevate the concept of bringing work home. Time and attention are

in short supply; getting a piece of both from our communities will require a much greater effort.

Is that issue best addressed by bringing in the National Conference for Community and Justice? We believe, so long as community volunteers stay actively engaged in the process, NCCJ may provide exactly the kick needed to get the discussion on diversity going again.

However, an effort the community does not stand squarely behind will fail, because no organization can create what is most necessary to combat racism, bigotry and hatred, what is essential to building a community that embraces its diversity. It's up to each one of us to reach out into our neighborhoods and form the bonds of understanding and tolerance.

Soon, Farmington Hills will be home to one of the most powerful testaments to the triumph of the human spirit over the horrors of bigotry and hatred, as the Holocaust Memorial Center takes shape at 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Roads.

With the efforts of local volunteers and the NCCJ, we believe our residents can live up to that privilege.

Commission sets an example with 'Pay it Forward' award

Talk about putting your money where your mouth is.

The Commission on Children, Youth and Families didn't just pay lip service to the "Pay it Forward" program by honoring participants with its Gov. George Romney Volunteer of the Year award. This year, they lived up to its spirit.

Recognizing Romney's strong advocacy for volunteerism, the award annually recognizes those who have contributed their time and talents toward making our communities a better place to live. This year, the commission decided to pay homage to a program that encouraged everyone to volunteer, by doing something for someone they couldn't do for themselves.

We commend the commission for recognizing that in many ways, people throughout our communities do kind things for one another every day. That's the kind of encouraging message we hope inspires others to do the same.

The commission set a wonderful example, by using funds reserved for the annual volunteer recognition event to help send kids in need to YMCA summer camp.

Now the ball's back in our court. We look forward to seeing more "Pay it Forward" stories, which can be sent to 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; faxed to (248) 477-9722; or e-mailed to jhubred@oe.homecomm.net

Legislature should end bickering on budget

The discussion over whether the state should hike its 76-cents-per-pack sin tax on tobacco products, like so many other debates between partisan legislators, broke down last week into finger-pointing and subtle name-calling.

Democrats whined that Republicans who supported the tax were discriminating against middle class and poor folk, who make up a large portion of those addicted to tobacco products, and said (gasp!) the Republicans were anti-working people.

Democrats also balked at the cigarette tax because it was proposed in lieu of delaying implementation of business tax cuts that even high-profile Republicans such as GOP gubernatorial candidate Joe Schwarz have come out in favor of delaying.

GOP legislators (surprise!) branded Democrats as pro-tobacco industry. Since about 20 cents of the proposed 50-cent hike would go to schools, Republicans also accused Dems of being anti-schools.

When you bill it down, it's all election-year hype and grandstanding, and it ought to stop when discussion resumes today (Thursday) in Lansing.

According to an analysis released by the House Republican Policy Office, the bill would raise:

- About \$152.5 million for the general fund in fiscal 2003.
- About \$160 million for schools.
- About \$23.4 million for the Medicaid Trust Fund.

■ About \$5.8 million to be used in Wayne County for indigent health care.

With the state facing a budget shortfall that could approach \$350 million next year, legislators are running out of options.

Debating who pays for the shortfall is short-sighted. With that kind of deficit

looming, the state has no choice but to fix it. When there's no money, you do one of two things: cut programs or raise taxes. Either way, someone is going to pay.

Supporters of the tax say it will stave off cuts in several areas of the budget. They point to potential reductions in education (10 percent of school readiness grants; the rest to 50 percent slashing of arts grants); and cuts in revenue sharing, which have already hurt many of our communities.

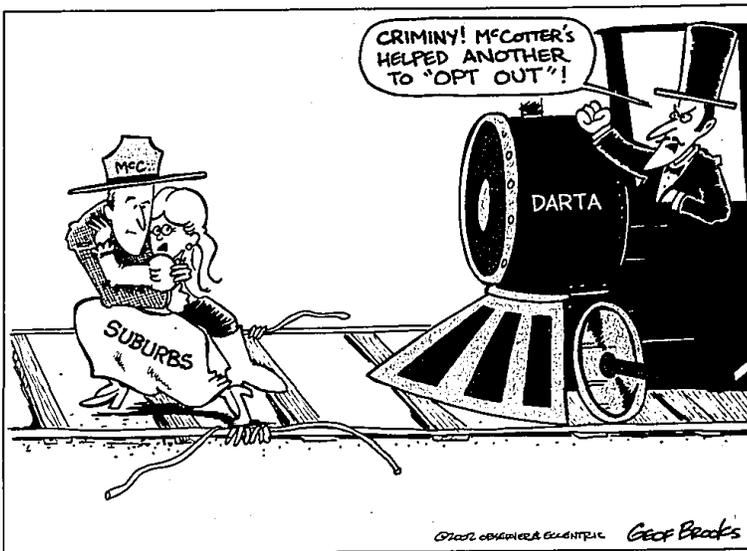
Certainly, the sin tax won't be popular with some small-business owners, say, tobacco store operators. Smokers certainly won't like it much. We don't necessarily buy the theory that a higher cigarette tax may prompt attendance at smoking cessation classes. More likely, smokers will loudly decry the tax as they stand in line waiting to buy the next pack.

The tobacco tax doesn't address broader state funding problems, and could be seen as an election-year gimmick. Delaying or reversing the unnecessary tax cuts might be a better solution.

State Rep. John Stewart (R-Plymouth Township) says the vote to pass the cigarette tax are there, with the return of State Rep. Laura Toy (R-Livonia) and Dearborn Republican Dean Woronechak, both of whom missed last week's vote.

No matter who's in the room, legislators have a daunting task in front of them. Gov. John Engler has reportedly told the legislature they can plan on staying until the deal is done on the cigarette tax.

The election-year game-playing should stop. With a \$350 million budget deficit looming, all bets ought to be on the table. It shouldn't take a threat by the governor to get legislators to do what they were sent to Lansing to do: Their jobs.



LETTERS

PLAs manipulate market

Project Labor Agreements — called PLAs — are a custom practiced by purchasers of construction whereby competitive bidding is restricted to union-hiring contractors and subcontractors. PLAs are rife in public-owned, government-funded work and in many privately owned construction projects where the welcome mat is out for union only — and all others need not apply.

Do union-hiring contractors deserve the favoritism? Granted (despite public perception to the contrary), in the United States unions represent less than 20 percent of construction workers. In Michigan, less than 30 percent of the building trades are union members.

So basically, it would seem, union is decidedly a minority.

But is helping a deprived minority the reason for the "set-aside" policy that prevails in those public and private projects?

Well, for one thing, the union "minority" is hardly a downtrodden one, when you consider the boycotts and other project disruption they can wreak on an owner with the temerity to ignore the union label. And that goes a good deal beyond mere picketing of the jobsite. What's more, with their bloated, generously funded staffs and huge advertising and membership budgets, the unions can out-gun the typical merit contractor in many ways.

For instance, there's the practice of "job targeting," where the union will "buy" or subsidize the job for a union contractor. It's the same kind of anti-competitive trick foreign countries pull on us to discourage the import of American goods. And our union friends are right there with us complaining about.

Yes, the pro-union forces will tell you about the training, wages and benefits their people enjoy. But as a long-time member of Associated Builders & Contractors (ABC), I know our members participate in training programs second to none, our craftspeople home comparable wages and benefits — plus as independents, all of us have the satisfaction of working with pride and commitment to quality and value for the customer. It's called merit, my friends, merit.

Meanwhile the predatory, anti-competitive PLA practices continue, manipulating the market for unionized contractors and abusing the public trust.

In face of all this, one wonders—whatever became of free enterprise?

Jim Struble
CEO RCI Electric, Farmington Hills

Lawmakers hear kids

In concurrence with Jan Brachel's letter (June 6), young people are indeed "screaming to be heard." I'm pleased to report this message has reached the State Legislature.

On Wednesday (June 5) the House Committee on Children and Family Services passed a resolution supporting a streamlined state effort with the Department of Education and Family Independence Agency to assist in the development of after-school youth programs across Michigan. I had the honor of sharing the successes of Farmington Hills in the field of youth

development.

The selfless work of Todd Lipa and Mayor Nancy Bates, along with the young people themselves, have helped to provide youth local leadership experience, a chance to make positive contributions, and most importantly, a chance to create a stronger sense of belonging in this community for them.

After-school programs are not solely responsible for the success of young people. Rather, they open doors for young people to apply their talents. I commend our state's legislators in this bi-partisan effort which I'm certain will continue to be embraced by the new governor and 89rd Legislature next year.

Above all however, I commend local leaders like Jan Brachel, Todd Lipa, and Nancy Bates for their undying support of this cause. These efforts are good for my family, good for your family, and excellent for Michigan's communities.

David Kinchen
Farmington Hills

Vagnozzi fits the bill

Highest compliments are in order for your fine, and very much to-the-point editorial in your June 13th edition. "House candidates urged to take high ground."

Without question this community needs, and is highly receptive to, clear, focused discussion of pertinent issues discussing the district's well-being. Intermittent arguments distract and are wasteful of everyone's time and energy.

As you so well stated: "What matters is the face that greets you at your door, the person who introduces himself or herself and says, 'I want to represent you and here's what I believe.'"

Sounds like someone who has knocked on every door in this community, doesn't it?

Clearly Aldo Vagnozzi fits the bill.

Dan Greenberg
Farmington Hills

Blue Star banners

Your editorial about Flag Day reminded me about the Memorial Day Parade article and the speeches and wreath laying that occurred following the parade.

Missing from your coverage was information about the American Legion's program to revive the Blue Star Service Banner honoring those family members currently serving in our armed forces. These banners are available to families from our local American Legion post on Grand River.

The events of Sept. 11 have made all of us more aware of issues facing our country and the world.

The Blue Star Service Banner is a small reminder of the sacrifices made by those who are serving our country today.

Remembering them, I think, honors the liberties, the democratic values, the flag and the upcoming 4th of July holiday.

Paul Blizman
Farmington Hills

All or nothing's wrong

In the late 70's, when I and few other local Republicans re-activated the Farmington Republican Club and

renamed it the Farmington Area Republican Club, the power to endorse candidates was a hotly debated topic.

I held out for the power to endorse candidates even in a Primary Election. Your readers may recall that a few years earlier in the middle 70's, a Mr. Patterson who was not truly a Republican ran for Congress from the 17th District, which included Northwest Detroit, Southfield and Farmington. Some primary voters may have confused him with L. Brooks Patterson.

It became clear to me at that time that the Republican leadership needed to have some method of identifying those who were Republican from those who were not, which is why I felt it important to endorse in primaries.

The initial meetings of FARC were marked with some skepticism, but the early leadership welcomed the range of views in the party. The club has grown and prospered. One of the founding intents was that ALL Republicans would be welcome, and we would discuss our differences. But our principal mission was to elect Republicans to all levels of government.

As I view the current debate in the press, I fear the current leadership is going down the same path that the Old Farmington Club leadership did. Furthermore, I fear that the FARC may become irrelevant just as the old club did when it became the tool of one individual. I'd hate for that to happen again.

I've known Terry Sever for nearly 30 years and John Akouri for nearly as long (since he attended school with my children). I know they both support the Republican principals of limited government and the rights of the individual. I haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Knol yet, but I look forward to the opportunity.

I fear the current leadership of the FARC has chosen a divisive path rather than inclusive path...Let's all work together to elect a Republican that will truly represent constituents in Lansing. Having an all or nothing endorsement is the wrong action to take when we have two or three qualified candidates.

Michael A. Chekal
Past FARC President

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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