

OUR VIEWS

Council should stay in the tax break game

In the past couple of months, Farmington Hills city council members have approved plans for two very large tax abatements. Both are six-year breaks from real and personal property taxes. The first, approved in June to help fund a \$36 million expansion at Nissan, will total \$810,000, \$202,000 of which will be city taxes. Most recently, officials created a district that will allow an abatement to assist Akebono in a \$32 million expansion. That will result in a \$1.7 million abatement, \$417,000 of which is city taxes.

Every time they walk down this road, city officials engage in a bit of wailing and gnashing of teeth. We understand and appreciate their pain; the Michigan Economic Growth Authority has essentially tied their hands by requiring a local contribution when the state gives tax breaks to big businesses.

The fact of the matter is, these tax incentives help keep businesses in Farmington Hills — and in Nissan's case, in the U.S. Even though tax breaks are temporary, the construction they fuel is here to stay and will generate more taxes in years to come. What's more, in both cases, the expansions will create more high-paying, technical jobs. That's a condition of both the MEGA and local tax abatement policies, and it just makes sense. Businesses request six and seven-figure tax breaks ought to be held accountable for how they spend the money. They should be asked to demonstrate their commitment to the community.

But city officials have a responsibility as well, to encourage economic development and support the growth of Hills businesses, which carry about 65 percent of the city's tax burden. While we understand and agree with their stand regarding the state's tax break program, a public hearing on a tax abatement is not the time to complain.

Certainly, there's a fair amount of posturing on both sides of this issue. Businesses often make no secret of the fact that they've been offered tax incentives by other jurisdictions or that they have plans to move elsewhere. For better or worse, our economic system is a competitive one.

We urge Hills officials to stay in the running by doing whatever they can to encourage growth and expansion, even if they don't particularly care for the rules of the game.

Death penalty: Is it time?

Capital punishment is an emotional issue, one that many people have deep and defensible beliefs about both for and against.

Some people are convinced that the possibility of a death sentence if caught and convicted is enough to deter someone from committing the ultimate heinous act of taking a life. Further, they see the punishment — paying for murder by forfeiting your own life — as the toughest and truest form of justice. Others believe the death penalty is overkill, so to speak, and the threat has little to do with stopping someone from a murderous course. The anti-capital punishment crowd also points to a certain hypocrisy that wonders how a state can both outlaw and condone killing.

Although Michigan hasn't executed anyone in more than 150 years, a new call for establishing the death penalty is rumbling right here in Oakland County. It's too soon to tell whether the current rhetoric will lead anywhere, but some influential people like Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer and county Executive L. Brooks Patterson are inviting the pot.

The rebirth of the capital punishment movement stems in part from a fresh string of high-profile cop killings.

Although we acknowledge that the death of a police officer in the line of duty is a terrible and tragic occurrence, is it proper for capital punishment supporters to capitalize on these horrible acts in search of such a monumental change?

Is the death penalty really so desperately needed in Michigan now or are recent tragedies clouding the overall issue and appealing to anger and emotion instead of calmness and objectivity?

Death-penalty advocates would probably say you have to strike while the iron is hot and what's wrong with pursuing the idea while the population is suitably sensitive and sympathetic to police officers cut down tragically?

Yet, it doesn't seem right that a question no one was talking about last year is poised to become the next big thing and placed before voters, perhaps in 2004. Wouldn't a state that truly wants — or needs — capital punishment have had it on the ballot in the past decade or so?

Seeking a death penalty referendum now — or in the near future — smacks of opportunism. And when advocates link it to the recent deaths of police officers, aren't they saying — consciously or not — that the taking of a law enforcement officer's life demands a harsher penalty than what is meted out for anyone else? We despise cop killers and grieve for the families and friends and colleagues of those left behind. Yet if the three metro area officers who were killed this year instead were three accountants or three cashiers or three reporters, would the people now calling for capital punishment in Michigan still be doing so?

They would not, and that's the point that shouldn't be overlooked as we start heading into a new round of death penalty debate.



The Clarenceville High School Choralers performed at Livonia City Hall during remembrance ceremonies on Sept. 11. Within the district, students were encouraged to wear red, white and blue and many classes focused on the theme of "Courage" during the day.

LETTERS

Forgotten workers

Although our union friends traditionally use Labor Day to honor their members, we think as we hold our picnics and cookouts and attend parades, that it's also important to remember the many contributions of "the other guys" to the nation's economy.

I'm referring to the millions of American men and women who choose to work in open shops — that is, who are not union members.

That we have overlooked them is unfortunate because, from my long experience, open shop craftspeople are trained to the highest standards of skill and safety. With no limits on their ambition or on how many crafts they can master, they are dedicated to turning out quality and value in job after job.

In fact, in the construction industry, of which I am a part, over 80 percent are open shop workers. Moreover, U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics indicate that over 85 percent of American workers are non-union, compared with roughly 14 percent who are.

As CEO of RCI Electric, President of the Southeastern Michigan Chapter of Associated Builders & Contractors and head of one of 23,000 merit or open shop construction and construction-related firms across the country, I invite everyone in the community to join me in publicly acknowledging and thanking these hard working men and women.

Just in case others forgot.

James Struble
President, RCI Electric

Aldo's energetic

There have been several recent letters to the Editor extolling the energy and vigor of Republican candidate Valerie Knol.

I joined Aldo in his "Walk to Lansing" in May and I can attest to the fact that Aldo has both the energy and the experience for the job of State Representative for our district.

John Lightner
Farmington

Enlightened debate

In regard to the Observer article (9/01/02) describing a planned campaign to regulate capital punishment in Michigan, it should be clarified that the 12 states that do not support capital punishment include Alaska and Alabama, as reported in the article.

It might be noted that, as some Michigan officials and citizens want to allow capital punishment here, Illinois has recently placed a moratorium on the practice because over a dozen prisoners were found innocent after serving years on death row. In addition, our neighbors, Canada and Mexico, as well as all other western industrialized nations, have abandoned the practice for such reasons as its inadequate use and imperfect legal systems that sentence innocent people to death.

It has been decided by many states and countries that state sanctioned killing affects all people because it diminishes the value placed on human life. Many people believe "respect for life" even includes the lives of those people who have been convicted of serious crimes. Hopefully, the debate on this issue in

the coming months will include a fair hearing from both sides, as well as an accurate portrayal of the impact in other states, the issues of deterrence and retribution, as well as the cost of capital punishment vs. incarceration without parole, both in monetary terms and in terms of how best to progress towards a more humane society.

Michigan has a long tradition as a state without the death penalty and sufficient, enlightened discussion should be the focus for all community groups before a decision is made.

George Wright
Farmington

Paying the dead

No one in today's world can fully pay the dead for their sacrifice. As Ernie Harwell so often has said, "It is long gone." We today don't even recognize President Lincoln's birth date anymore. The media doesn't tell you he (Abe) signed the proclamation that freed the slaves. It doesn't remind you of his character and his principles that encouraged him to do what he believed in.

Many, have over the years given their lives as a sacrifice. Pilgrims who braved the oceans and first came to America, heroes who fought Great Britain to free America and so on.

All the slaves did not suffer. Many were well treated. As I understand, many even stayed on after they were freed.

Well, we could go on and on. As I see it — it is another gimmick by the lawyers to get business. They are doing it every day on TV. As one said on TV this past Monday night "We gotta make a living."

I suggest as President Kennedy said, "Not what our country can do for me, but what we can do for our country." I like to add that, "Thanks to God who made and gave us this blessed country." Now we should:

- 1 - Do well in maintaining it.
- 2 - Show our appreciation.
- 3 - Learn about our heritage, what has really made our country the greatest in the world, instead of self gratification that does not help those who suffered.

Leslie Swanson
Farmington

Get facts straight

I don't mind letter writers such as Crystal Gutierrez making negative remarks about me, but I wish she would not use false information about me to do it.

Her letter claimed that I was retired as Mayor by the citizenry. Nothing could be further from the truth. I left because of term limits which are part of the Farmington Hills charter. The charter, not the voters, limits a Mayor to two, two-year terms, which I served, as well as one year as Mayor before we went to the elective system.

In fact, the voters were so satisfied with my record for the first two years as an elected Mayor that I was unopposed when I ran for re-election. When I left the office of Mayor because of term limits my colleagues praised my ability to unify the Council in the direction of giving the public excellent services.

I will serve the public equally well as a State Representative. I am also amazed that Gutierrez wants to sweep her candidate's last minute

smear of Terry Sever under the rug. That's not the way we run elections in Farmington and Farmington Hills. These two communities believe in clean and positive campaigns based on the issues. My experience at the state, local and school board levels would serve our two communities well, especially as we face a Legislature where two-thirds of the Senate and up to half the House will be brand new.

Aldo Vagnozzi
Farmington Hills

Hold them accountable

The start of the 2002 school year was greeted by the usual public school apologists' whining about standards and accountability.

Front page stories decried mindless comparisons of simultaneous positive and negative ratings for the same schools. They attacked the MEAP, which has the audacity to test students, because it gave contrary negative ratings to the Public Schools' favorite long list of awards and recognitions whose ratings are 80-100 percent based on what is provided to the school system, not on what they do with it.

Those who attack the MEAP would dismiss as unimportant the following: It's graduation day in Farmington's elementary schools. At an elementary school graduation assembly the graduating class stands up and shouts "let Johnny graduate," Johnny being the only child not graduating. The principal relents and gives Johnny another chance.

"If I have five apples in my left hand and five apples in my right hand, Johnny how many apples do I have?" the principal asks. Horrified parents gasp, a MEAP question! Johnny thought long and hard and finally said, "ten." Hearing Johnny's answer, the entire class stands and shouts "Give Johnny another chance, give Johnny another chance!"

My support of Farmington Public Schools is based on their stated commitment that "Literacy is a student's ability to communicate what they know." Individual student MEAP/HSPT performance communicates their level of literacy. Less than a proficient rating is a signal of illiteracy.

Schools should be held accountable to verify the condition and, if verified, to correct it.

David L. York
Farmington Hills

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.

Mail:
Letters to the editor
Farmington Observer
33411 Grand River
Farmington, MI 48335

Fax:
(248) 477-9722

E-mail:
jhured@oe.homecomm.net

QUOTABLE

"I'd hate to see a company held hostage while you have something against the state."

Chamber of Commerce President Carleigh Flaherty on the Akebono tax abatement

FARMINGTON
Observer

Part of HomeTown Communications Network™

Jon Hubred
Community Editor

Todd Williams
Director of Advertising

Hugh Gallagher
Managing Editor

Tom Neri
General Manager

Susan Rosiek
Executive Editor

Dick Agnina
President

Jeanne Towar
V.P. Editorial

Phil Power
Chairman of the Board

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.