



MEMBERS

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## Courage in the debate over new schools

By PATRICK WEADON

Many county residents may not be aware of the fact that the last time Anne Arundel County built a new high school, Ronald Wilson Reagan was in the White House.

Some might not be troubled by this fact. After all, building schools on the taxpayer dime can be expensive, and as Del. Cathy Vitale has noted time and time again, Anne Arundel is a "tax adverse" jurisdiction.

### GUEST COLUMN

It is worth noting, however, that during the same time period, Howard, Prince George's and Montgomery counties have all built several new high schools, and that if you use per capita income as a measure, Anne Arundel is the third richest county in Maryland.

With these facts in mind, a casual observer of our county's educational policies might wonder why Anne Arundel taxpayers are incapable of providing our students the same advantages as those who live in the aforementioned areas.

What does this mean for those of us living in the county?

Well, for one, education is, and will continue to be, a critical factor. New high schools are not the sole bell-weather of a region's educational prowess, but building new high schools is not, as some would tell you, waste, fraud and abuse, but rather strong evidence of a well thought out plan for the future.

Not only have we been incapable of finding a way to build new schools we also have been unable to maintain the ones we have now.

Some of our political leaders have proposed having developers replace taxpayers as the builders of our schools through the use of "leasing agreements." These proposals are thought provoking on some level, but they also raise the question: Why don't other jurisdictions have to go begging to the business community to get their children the schools they deserve?

This is why the recent proposal by Councilman Jamie Benoit to create a special fund that would use income taxes to pay for a 13th public high school in the county is such a wonderful (and courageous) idea.

Please note Benoit is not advocating raising taxes across the board or repealing the current county tax cap. He is simply asking county taxpayers to live up to their obligations in the educational arena.

We need to realize that effective education systems are expensive and if we are going to be able to compete with other local jurisdictions we had better start thinking about new and improved ways to fund and maintain one of the 50 largest educational systems in the country.

This goal will never be realized if we do not have the resources required to produce and develop a highly educated workforce that can deal with the challenges of the future.

The reality is, however, we cannot get the good jobs without the good schools. And we cannot possibly meet the educational demands of the future with broken down buildings and temporary trailers as far as the eye can see.

Conservatives used to mock President Bill Clinton when he told them he was in favor of investing in education. They believed the word "investment" was a euphemism for a tax increase.

But the truth is raising taxes for new schools, higher teacher salaries and improved resources across the board, not only improve the economy but is an indispensable part of any modern day effort to keep pace with the global economy.

Benoit's initiative should be implemented. By doing so we will bring about a new day in Anne Arundel County and give our children the future they deserve.

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