

LETTERS

Write to The Editor, Isthmus, 101 King St., Madison, WI 53703 (edit@isthmus.com). Include your name, address and phone.

School board failure

Jason Shepard: I am glad *Isthmus* is devoting more attention to education issues. However, your column about folks making pleas to the members of the school board to save the elementary strings program ("The Cruellest Cuts," 5/6/05) struck a nerve.

Last month, I attended the all-school strings festival at East High. As has become customary at these events, the program started with a plea to the audience to contact school board members and ask them to save the elementary strings program. Our family has done our bit over the last few years to urge the school board not to eviscerate elementary strings and other valuable programs that are distinctive to Madison's schools.

I am sick of it.

Rather than politely implore the members of the school board to ride to the rescue of these programs, I would rather ask them to defend their budgetary choices that compel the need for this ritual year after year. What is surprising to me is how effectively the school board has been able to escape responsibility for the scope of the financial problems the district faces.

I am not a fan of the state-imposed spending caps, but they are reality. They establish the budget parameters within which the school board must work. The annual budget can increase about 2.5% each year, but no more. It appears to me that the school board does a terrible job of financial man-

agement and oversight within the confines of the parameters that the spending caps establish.

What seems to happen is that the board, with apparently little deliberation, locks itself into labor contracts that require spending increases well in excess of 2.5% per year. Little attention is paid to the fact that each extra dollar of spending on these contracts means one more dollar of cuts from the strings program and freshman sports and the other programs that are on the chopping block each year.

When it's time for those cuts, most school board members throw up their hands and say, look at the terrible things the state spending caps make us do.

It seems to me that the story here is that the majority of the school board members have decided that they are willing to have the district pay the price to ensure labor peace within the district, and it is this decision, in conjunction with the spending caps, that guarantees the level of spending cuts that must be made each year.

Critics of school board decisions can and probably will be accused of being anti-school and generally rude people. (Ask Ruth Robarts.) But it is those of us who love the schools and the distinctive and valuable programs they offer (like the strings program) who should be most upset that those programs are imperiled by the school board's failures in oversight and financial management.

Ed Hughes

I want to thank *Isthmus* for its continued reporting on the Madison Metropolitan School District. On topics from curriculum to safety, the entire Madison community has benefited from your thoughtful and insightful work. The daily papers have dropped the ball on education reporting, and the public would be left in the dark were it not for the reporting of *Isthmus*.

Jeff Henriques

Wanted: grocery stores

The north side continues its efforts to bring back a grocery store to our community. Currently, there are two grocers very interested in opening a store in our community ("Sorting Out the Groceries," 3/25/05).

The rash of grocery store closings over the past five years in Madison and Waukegan has hurt the affected neighborhoods. Each empty-store situation is unique. The SuperSaver store that closed in 2000 may never be replaced. Ken Kopp's closing in 2001 may result in a grocery store. The north-side Sherman Plaza location has not had a store for two years, but may well have one by the end of the year. In addition, the north side will get a farmers' market at Sherman Plaza this June.

The Northside Planning Council has led efforts to bring back a grocery store to our community, involving hundred of residents in the process. Our market basket report, released in October jointly with the Hunger Prevention Council, demonstrated the lack of food

MAD CITY | Brian Strassburg

KNOW THE NEWS / ISTHMUS PHOTO QUIZ

MR. PUTIN AND MR. BUSH ARE ATTEMPTING TO START MR. PUTIN
A. CAMARO B. PONTIAC AZTEK
C. TRICKED-OUT GEO METRO D. VOLGA

WHILE MR. BUSH IS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO DRIVE A STR
HE'S ASKING MR. PUTIN IF...

A. HE'D LIKE HIS CAR OUTFITTED WITH SOME
OF THAT NEW -FANGLED HYBRID EQUIPMENT

B. IT WOULD BE OKAY TO LAUNCH A PREEMPTIVE
ATTACK AGAINST MONGOLIA

C. THERE ARE ANY LOOSE NUKES IN
THE TRUNK

D. THE RUSSIAN PARLIAMENT FAVORS
TORT REFORM

E. HE'D LIKE TO VISIT AMERICA AND KICK
SOME ACTIVIST-JUDGE ASS

F. THERE IS ANY OF THAT GAY STUFF
GOING ON IN RUSSIA

G. THEY COULD BUY A 12 - PACK AND
DRIVE OVER TO TONY BLAIR'S HOUSE

MR. D. Volga/Bush, in fact, probably asked all these questions



options for our community and identified it as the only "food desert" in Madison. Ours is not just a "quality of life" issue, but also a "basics of life" one.

Susan Hill, Janet Aronson
co-chairs
Northside Planning Council

Quite simple

So some members of the UW-Madison Animal Care and Use Committee are "uneasy" with public scrutiny of their service on the committee (Watchdog, 4/1/05). Perhaps they've forgotten that service is public not only in its nature, but by law. And for good reason, since it's at public expense, and affects spending of public money. It's quite simple, actually. If you're "uneasy" about serving the public interest in the public eye, don't join a public committee!

Paul O'Leary

FORUM

Excerpts from Forum, community page
www.thedailypage.com

Don't know if it's on the air yet, but I heard some new songs on the radio. This time it's Ch... song lineup that mixes nonc...

I like their slogan: "We play hear them play some Jesus..."

I read somewhere (a blog or something) that the person who's store. This may not be my p... say Charlie works for me. It want to minimize the chatti... want to pay for satellite or...

I gave this new format a bri... something not quite right w... Moody Blues back-to-back. reserved for the dentist cha...

20 YEARS AGO

From the Isthmus archives, May 17, 1985

Cattle call

"R.E.M., which I've unblushingly called America's best guitar pop band, sounded like America's blurriest band at the UW Stock Pavilion show on May 10," staff writer Phil Davis notes in his review. The Cow Palace acoustics rendered Peter Dinklage's ringing, elliptical guitar lines and Michael Stipe's growls and whines indistinct, but "the energy and raw power of the songs, with which most of the 3,000-plus ecstatic

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