

POINTS OF VIEW

Be in the know: Read blue ribbon tech report

Almost everybody has experienced the Information Revolution in one form or another: personal computers; faxes, pagers, cell phones, robotics, automatic teller machines, the Internet.

But, warns a report released by the blue-ribbon Michigan Information Technology Commission (MITC), Michigan's businesses, communities, schools and government offices are unprepared to take full advantage of the Information Revolution.

Sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation and the Council of Michigan Foundation, the MITC brought together 40 leaders from Michigan's business, government, non-profit and media communities for 10 months of fact-finding and deliberation.

I was a member of the MITC. I came away from the process very impressed at the sincerity and diligence of my colleagues and enormous challenge at the implications of the Information Revolution for every

person in Michigan.

The MITC report begins with a Call to Action: "Abrupt and fundamental leaps in technology are very rare, taking place perhaps once or twice in a century. But they can transform the lives of people, the fate of economic organizations and even the direction of states and nations." The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century was one example; the Information Revolution of today is another.

"History teaches that a society that does not act promptly and aggressively in the face of a transforming technology risks being overtaken by those that do," continues the report. "We do not have the luxury of standing still. We either establish leadership positions in the use and production of information technology or we sit back and watch our economic base shrivel and our children seek their livelihoods elsewhere."

The MITC report points out that Michigan can never lead the world in the production of silicon chips the way Silicon Valley in California has or in



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the design of software the way Seattle (headquarters of Microsoft) has become. But the report concludes that, "Michigan has the necessary elements to establish a self-renewing and sustaining environment for new generations of information technology."

The dynamics of this process, according to the report, involve Michigan's becoming a world leader in applying and transferring this technology throughout our state, thereby creating enormous demand for new products and for talented information workers. "This demand, in turn, can

stimulate Michigan's researchers, entrepreneurs and workers to create new products and services to be sold throughout the world," the report concludes.

The MITC report contains 17 broad recommendations and 50 detailed action steps for positioning Michigan to be a leader in information technology. Some examples:

■ Educators should use the Internet and other information technology to greatly expand learning opportunities for students and for workers of all ages. For example, the Michigan Virtual University will soon bring together professors from all around the state to offer education and job training via cable TV, CD-ROM and the Internet.

■ Businesses should create new software and experiment with new forms of organization to increase worker creativity and productivity by maximizing use of information technology. For example, the auto industry is building a data network in metro Detroit that will both save millions and allow companies worldwide

to coordinate shipments, design products, transfer funds and communicate via e-mail and videoconference.

■ Health care professionals should expand use of information technology in improving the health of Michigan's citizens. For example, in northern Michigan, doctors are offering long-distance consultation for patients via an advance video network. The days of "computer-assisted diagnosis" are not far off.

Every thoughtful person in Michigan should read this report. It offers a detailed and concrete wake-up call to our state. You can access the entire report on the web at www.michinfo-tech.org.

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@eonline.com

Democrats say they like a good fight; but it's not so ...

Don't give John Austin the speech about "work hard, pay your dues, plan carefully, and you'll be a success." He may be a little bitter about now.

Austin, 36, announced 18 months ago he was seeking the Democratic nomination for secretary of state. He is a senior project manager for Public Policy Associates, which is a potent think tank organization even if you haven't heard of it. He is a Genesee County road commissioner. He's a first-class orator, which always helps; good-looking, which never hurts; and well educated, which some folks think is important.

A week before the Democratic state convention, Austin had no opposition. He had the support of two of the three gubernatorial candidates (Owen and Ross), five of the 10 Democratic con-

gressmen (including Stabenow and Kildee), three state senators (including Gary Peters and Alma Smith), a couple dozen state reps (including Eileen DeHart, Tom Kelly and Nancy Quarles), two State Board of Education members, two University of Michigan regents (Phil Power and Libby Maynard) and more local party leaders than you can count.

Austin also developed a platform: campaign finance reform, caps on individual donations to political parties, a one-year moratorium on retired legislators becoming lobbyists, and so on.

So why didn't he win in a walk? Gubernatorial nominee Geoffrey Fieger wanted a black woman on the ticket as lieutenant governor. He couldn't find one, so he talked to a white woman and then to Rep. Jim



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Agee, a white male, a former school superintendent and the Democrats' top guy on public education.

Meanwhile, Jennifer Granholm, Wayne County corporation counsel and a white female, had emerged as the favorite for attorney general. That left Fieger without a black woman from Detroit on the ticket.

Michigan Democrats put together a ticket precisely the way TV's Archie

Bunker taught: "You get Feldman for treasurer ... Them people know how to handle money. Then you get Salvatore for district attorney - to keep an eye on Feldman. Then you get a Mick, O'Reilly, to make sure the graft is equally distributed."

Not a word about public service. Not a thought about ability.

So Fieger recruited Rep. Mary Lou Parks of Detroit to be the secretary of state candidate. Austin was assigned to make her nominating speech.

For nine minutes, Austin talked about his ideals and campaign. "Diversity is our greatest strength," he began. "Naturally, I'm very disappointed not to be part of the ticket," he said in an understatement.

He spent less than a minute talking about Parks. She knows the welfare budget, which is hardly a recom-

mendation for secretary of state. She chairs the Black Caucus. That was about it.

Democrats say they like a good fight. Not quite true. In the Republican convention, delegates faced with an ordained candidate for attorney general with no real qualifications rebelled against their own governor's wishes and picked someone they considered qualified, John Smolenski.

Democrats just caved in, however, and nominated Parks. Austin had enough supporters for a rebellion, judging by the white-on-black "a" signs in the convention hall, but they said to heck with ability and went with diversity.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His voice mail number is (734) 953-2047, ext. 1881.



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Large exhibit image

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