

editorial opinion

A decision to applaud by Hills lawmakers

Monday was a good night in Farmington Hills City Hall.

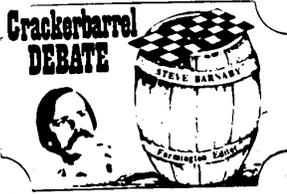
Now, probably nobody in town is a harsher critic of local politicians than myself. But this week I've got to stand back and give a mild hand of applause to six of the city's seven legislators for their decision to study the creation of special zoning for senior citizen housing.

THE DECISION to make such a study came after the Nardineers, a senior citizen group, made a plea to rezone property designated for single family to multiple dwelling. Under present Hills ordinance, senior housing can only be built in the multiple dwelling housing designation.

Needless to say, multiple dwelling zoning in the middle of single family housing drives residents crazy.

It was a tough night for the council, faced with a room full of senior citizens, on one hand, and a boy of protesting residents on the other.

The majority of those presenting arguments, pro and con, were logical, excluding Hills Homeowners Association representative Joe Alkateeb.



Alkateeb wins the bad taste award of the year for his personal attack on the Rev. Meredith Mosbauer, a spokesman for the Nardineers.

Joe's really not a bad guy, but his rendering of Mosbauer as an off-Broadway director launching an "allicit" production turned off even the harshest critics of the senior housing proposal.

But Joe's presentation was the exception.

THE COUNCIL'S decision should be lauded by all Farmington Hills residents. Paraphrasing Councilman Earl Oppenhausser, the decision insures that the young city will grow with a "heart and soul."

Councilman Fred Lichtman expressed the sentiments of many when he said the temptation was great to disregard the law. He was equally correct in observing that thwarting the law would only open a floodgate in the community.

Although Councilmember Joan Dudley didn't support the move, it is realized that in the end she will work to make the ordinance operate to the advantage of senior citizens if it is implemented.

While Ms. Dudley enjoys being fashioned as a conservative, she has an uncanny propensity for working on liberal causes.



The Democratic national convention was pitched, not to the delegates, but to the American people, who were really responsible for Jimmy Carter's nomination. (Staff photo)

Carter's new politics bypasses the power elite

Several months before Gov. Jimmy Carter received the Democratic Party's nomination for president, Averill Harriman—former governor of New York, ambassador at-large for the United States, and leading symbol of the eastern liberal establishment—made the following remark: "How can he be nominated? I don't know him, and neither do any of my friends."

Other than being a marvelous plug for the wisdom of the ordinary people who vote in primary elections, Harriman's remark offers an important insight into just how much politics has changed in this nation.

To generalize broadly, up to 10 years ago, presidential candidates were selected through the process of negotiation among power brokers. Governors like Nelson Rockefeller of New York, labor leaders like George Meany of the AFL-CIO, big city mayors like Chicago's Richard Daley, and senators like Georgia's Richard Russell were courted by various candidates.

Some primaries were held, and state conventions took place, each indicating candidates' relative strength and each scrutinized by the power brokers. Finally, one candidate or another would develop enough commitments from the power lords to amass enough votes to get the nomination at the national convention.

THIS PROCESS took place almost entirely within the framework of the political party.

The power elite derived their power from their positions within the party, and the forces of money and manpower they controlled came from within the political party organization.

During these years, it was inconceivable that a member of the party elite could never have met a serious candidate for the presidential nomination.

ALL THIS began to change in the late 1960s. The war in Viet Nam produced a vast number of ordinary citizens who, disgusted with the war, drove them into the political process and provided the driving force for the chaos of the Chicago Democratic convention of 1968. At that time, the old-line forces backing Sen. Hubert Humphrey prevailed, but only after a struggle.

The fallout from the war, the rising impact of television, and the increased number of primary elections paved the way for Sen. George McGovern's nomination in Miami in 1972.

The Democratic convention of last week in New York saw the process brought to its ultimate conclusion. Gov. Jimmy Carter's victory was brought about by a series of victories in primary elections, aided by the vast impact of television as a national medium, peopled by large numbers of vol-



by PHILIP H. POWER

unteers newly active in politics, and financed in large part by federal contributions to presidential campaigns.

Our politics have become those of personality, and the Averill Harrimans of this world have been pushed aside.

As MIT's respected political scientist, Walter Burnham, remarked: "This is personalistic politics under a thin party label—blank check politics with an individual (Carter) who is still not very well known. Carter completely bypassed the old Democratic structure. He will be the Democratic nominee, but the phrase means anything he makes it mean."

IT WAS this dynamic which made last week's convention so odd.

To watch it on television was to watch a spectacle, pitched not to the delegates who supposedly possessed the power to nominate but rather toward the American people who in fact nominated.

To cover the convention from the floor of Madison Square Garden was to cover an event populated by the power elite who recognized that their involvement in Carter's nomination was, although important, by no means crucial.

Even the demonstrations lacked force and power. Watching the demonstration following Carter's nomination, I was reminded of William Jennings Bryan's remark: "A convention feels about demonstrations somewhat like the big man who had a small wife who was in the habit of beating him. When asked why he permitted it, he replied that it seemed to please her and it did not hurt him." The Carter strategists would have agreed.

It was a new kind of convention, fueled by new kinds of forces in our politics. As I watched Carter's acceptance speech, I scrawled down a sentence that summarizes my feelings as a journalist covering something new.

"The absolutism of good, predicated on a new and strange populism, mediated by fashionable uncertainty and limited grasp, sold by the slickest technique I ever saw."

Right numbers, wrong answer

The newly formed Michigan Association of Recreational Snowmobilers comes up with this comparison: Michigan, with 1.3 million snowmobilers and over a half-million snowmobiles, has only 2,510 miles of groomed public snowmobile trails. Michigan ranks lowest among the snowbelt states in number of trail miles per snowmobile."

That's one way of looking at it. The other is that Michigan has too many snowmobiles per mile of snowmobile trails. For those who have been unable to hear the songs of winter above the flatulent bray of a snow machine's engine, the latter interpretation is more accurate.

It may be only an accident, but the snowmobile association's initials are MARS. Mars was the Roman god of war.

Political profit is taken out of 'kickback' system

Who woulda thunk it?

The state Constitutional Convention of 1961-2 couldn't get rid of the secretary of state as an elective officer or the system of political kickbacks from the branch managers. Michigan's Legislature hasn't been able to end such 19th century Jacksonian politics, and the voters have never elected any of the candidates for secretary of state who promised to put the branch managers on civil service and quit taking kickbacks.

Yet, in recent weeks we have been treated to the sight of a secretary of state saying the system will be eliminated.

TAKING CREDIT is a maverick candidate for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate. One time he'll label himself James Leonard Elisman, the international lawyer from Birmingham; another time he's "Dutch" Elisman, the conservative candidate who hails from the little burg of Parchment, in the Garden City of Kalamazoo County.

Elisman's specialty is entering impossible political races and doing it with his own money, an eccentric but possibly productive hobby if you can afford it.

Anyway, he's seeking a Senate nomination, and so is Richard Austin, the aforementioned secretary of state who is using contributions from his branch managers to finance his ambitions, much the same as virtually all his predecessors.

Now, social reformers will tell you the way to end an evil is to take the profit out of it. So Elisman began taking away Austin's political profit by hollering about the branch managers' contributions to Austin's Senate campaign, thus embarrassing the secretary of state.

Newspapers—the Free Press and the outstate Booties—picked up the tale, and soon Austin was pledging "no more."

BUT WATCH, Austin, for all his grandfathersly imagery, is as cynical, calculating and crafty a politician as Michigan has ever produced.

This is the man who, with a cophor named Kleiner, gerrymandered the living daylight out of the legislature a decade ago, butchered community boundaries in the false name of numerical equality.

This is the man who put his name on the envelope three times when he mailed you your license plates.

This is the man who sends "public service" commercials about safety to TV stations with his own spiel at the end.

So when Austin said he would end the political kickback system, one would logically expect him



to have a trick up his sleeve, and that's exactly what happened.

WHAT AUSTIN did was to say he will dismantle the political kickback system for future elections. But he darn well intends to keep those percentages of our license plate fees that he has collected for his current Senate campaign.

Elisman's response is to head for court and try to sue Austin into returning the money he already has accumulated, or at least the part that came from his cronies in the branch managers' offices.

Whether Elisman will do much better in the Senate primary than the one per cent accorded him in the polls, I won't speculate. Whether he'll bring Austin to his knees in court, I can't say. Whether Elisman ought to be a senator is not for me to judge.

But it does appear that the exploitation of our license plate fees for partisan and personal political purposes is, after a shameful half-century, on its way out, and that an anti-establishment candidate started the ball rolling.

Elisman deserves credit, even if he does take the credit himself.

Capital punishment: Greatest deterrent

When persons are convicted of a crime, it is up to the courts to sentence them or mete out a punishment. If judges are not severe in their sentencing, there is little to deter criminals from repeating their crimes.

On the other hand, if the sentence is too harsh, it can turn first offenders into hardened criminals and lead to disrespect for the law.

The American Bar Association's "Standards Relating to the Administration of Criminal Justice," says the purpose of a sentence are deterrence, separation (if the criminal is violent), rehabilitation and retribution.

THE SUPREME COURT recently said the death penalty is not cruel and inhuman treat-

ment and is the appropriate penalty for some crimes.

It has been a long time since the State of Michigan has had capital punishment.

Capital punishment is a very final thing. It deters crime; it is the ultimate in separation. While it has no rehabilitative value, it contains retribution in that the community feels the criminal has paid for his crime.

Capital punishment should not be used as a threat and should not be used frivolously. Yet, if we don't go back to making the punishment fit the crime, society has neither a way of discouraging violent crimes nor separating from society on a permanent basis a criminal who has been guilty of repeated acts of violence.

THE OPPONENTS of capital punishment have said no man has a right to take another man's life and that we should avoid Hammurabi's philosophy of "an eye for an eye."

But turning it around, when it is not safe to walk on the streets of major cities of the United States, it is time for society to act to deter people from taking eyes and lives.

In the past, capital punishment was arbitrarily meted out to the point where minorities and the poor seemed to dominate the death chambers.

The court ruled that the punishment could no longer be arbitrarily used and recommended that the sentence be considered only in cases where



by HENRY M. HIGGINS, JR.

two trials are held—one in which the judge and jury have tried the accused for guilt or innocence, followed by a separate trial to determine the proper punishment, based on the severity of the crime.

THE DECISION CLEARS the air and, essentially, saves for the ultimate punishment the most violent, anti-social acts.

But more important, the supreme court ruling says capital punishment is an appropriate punishment for some crimes and that not to provide for it in our laws means that we have removed the greatest deterrent from the minds of people who might commit an unsocial act.

If our streets are to be made safe and our homes to remain sacred, it is time that the Michigan Legislature consider enacting a capital punishment statute.

It will tell those people bent on breaking the law that society will hold them accountable.

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