

editorial opinion

Discontent growing among students

A bad seed is sprouting in the Farmington School District. This week a group of Farmington district students massed at the Hills city hall to hear council debate the pros and cons of raising the drinking age to 21 years.

It seems school administrators would prefer to raise the age to get alcohol out of the classroom. But, the kids say it wouldn't make much difference. I was able to corner a few out in the lobby to see just what was the situation in Farmington's high schools.

It's bad. "I would say that one in 10 students drink around school during the day," said one student.

"When the weather is warm a lot of kids skip class and sit in their cars and drink. I picked up six or seven six-packs of beer bottles in the parking lot one day," said another, who estimated that class attendance dips to 15 students in a class of 25 on the warm days.

BUT RAISING the age won't help much. You



can buy alcohol just about anywhere and nobody bothers much to check your proof," chimed in another student.

"A lot of the kids drink because they have family problems and are fed up with school. Things have really been getting bad since the millage failed.

"You can't get the classes you want and the many of the teachers don't know much about the

class they are teaching because they are filling in for teachers who were pink slipped," said a disgruntled student.

"We've got one teacher who brings in a tape recorder with his lectures on it. He just turns it on and sits there," continued the coed.

"Drinking has become more of a problem than drugs, but it's still easy to buy drugs. Everybody knows where to get them."

"What about violence?" I asked.

"It's not real bad, yet. But you've got to watch where you park your car in the parking lot. The g-balls, you know, the kids with leather jackets, they have their own parts of the lot. I know one kid who got the wiring torn out of his car. Sometimes tires are slashed."

"I saw a bunch of kids beat up a crippled kid once. You see other kids fight once in a while," observed a student.

"Don't the teachers control what's going on in the parking lots," I queried.

"They come through about once a month," was the answer.

"Yeah, I was really discouraged when I saw how bad things were this year with the millage out. I didn't even feel like going to school. But I knew I'd better."

Some folks would like to believe that the social problems only are bad in the Detroit school system. Parents, you'd better pay attention. The seeds of discontent are growing in the Farmington School District.

NOT A WORK OF ART...



Business drops SBT ball

Talk about the Silent Majority!

Some 3,760 businesses—94 per cent of those surveyed—are figuratively shutting up about a topic which, until recently, had them enraged. We refer to the Single Business Tax (SBT), that 2.5 per cent levy on value added which replaced seven or eight other state taxes on business at the beginning of 1976.

Loud were the lamentations when small businesses, in particular, calculated their first SBT tax bills. Gov. Milliken listened and then appointed Lt. Gov. James Damman (a hardware merchant in private life) to head a 37-member blue ribbon panel to review the SBT.

Damman's group began by trying to collect facts. It mailed a survey to 4,000 firms. So far, only about six per cent have responded.

The other 94 per cent constitute an overwhelming silent majority. Unless half of them, at least, respond, the Damman commission will have no choice but to conclude the squawks about SBT were merely idle complaints, and SBT will remain unchanged. So.

•If you are a business owner who received a survey form, fill it out and return it.

•If you received a form and turned it over to your accountant, make sure he returned it.

•If you are a business person who didn't receive a form, tell your state senator or representative in writing how, on balance, the SBT affected you.

The Silent Majority could hurt Michigan's business climate seriously.

New 'open meetings' law: A modest improvement

There is little reason to shout, cheer or even grin at Michigan's new open meetings law, passed by the legislature last week.

You have to figure that any bill which passes the senate 32-3 and the house 86-7 has got to be almost bland, and that no wholesale reforms can be expected of it.

On balance, the open meeting law deserves to be greeted with a restrained, Mona Lisa-ish smile.

TO BEGIN WITH, the final bill listed six kinds of meetings that can be closed to the public. That's a fairly long list.

The trouble with such a list is this: If a governing board can legally discuss one thing behind closed doors, they can actually discuss two things; if they can legally discuss two things, they will actually discuss four; if three topics are permitted, they'll discuss nine.

It's a law of human behavior: Give the board members an inch and they'll take a mile. So even if the individual things on the list look good, a long list of exemptions is a bad thing—and this list has six exemptions.

ONE PARTICULARLY bad exemption is partisan caucuses. If you consider that township boards are the most distrustful of the public of any kind of government in Michigan, that exemption is particularly significant.

Consider: The Bloomfield Township Board is 7-0 Republican; the West Bloomfield Township Board is 7-0 Republican; the Redford Township Board is 7-0 Democratic; the Canton Township Board is 6-1 Democratic; the Plymouth Township Board is 7-0 Republican.

See the loophole? In every case, the entire board—or at least an overwhelming majority—can go into a secret session and call it a partisan caucus.

THERE ARE GOOD points to the new law. School boards automatically call secret sessions whenever there is a student or faculty discipline



Tim Richard

problem. No longer will this be possible. The meeting will automatically be public unless the student or faculty member in question asks that it be closed. The school board can't keep the dirty linen off the clothesline unless the other party wants it hidden.

No longer will secret meetings be called "executive" sessions. Thus, the American language will be rid of that foul term. For years I have been asking lawyers, face to face and in print, how a legislative body like a city council or school board could hold an "executive" meeting. Never did any lawyer respond, but they kept helping the boards which paid them hold "executive" meetings.

THE NEW LAW requires that a board planning to hold a closed meeting announce the topic in advance, get a two-thirds vote to hold the closed meeting, and keep minutes; those minutes must be retained for 366 days but need not be made public except in event of a court case.

That's a little help. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the new law, when it takes effect next April 1, changes the secrecy psychology that infects so much of our local government, particularly school boards.

Lawyers state—erroneously—that "ours is a government of laws, not men." Actually, there's no way all our laws can be enforced. People must want to obey the law voluntarily or the law is useless.

The sad truth in Michigan is that a majority of governing boards, particularly school boards, have sincerely and deeply believed in secrecy. Unless that old belief is discarded, the new law will do little good.

Voters look for character

After a slow start, the political season is starting to heat up around these parts.

Last week, Livonia's Mayor Edward McNamara arranged a meeting between 35 area suburban mayors and Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in Dearborn. The same evening, Plymouth's State Senator and Republican congressional candidate, Carl Fursell was prominent on the platform at the Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor as President Ford kicked off his campaign at his alma mater.

Tonight marks the first in the series of debates scheduled between Ford and Carter—a form of political confrontation we have not seen since the Nixon-JFK debates in 1960. In the opinion of the experts, those match-ups were centrally important in the election outcome, not because they provided the audience with any great illumination on the difference between the candidates' positions on the issues, but rather because of what they revealed about their differing personalities.

I expect the Ford-Carter debates will prove important for the same reasons.

THIS IS, no doubt, anathema to my liberal friends, who are constantly harping on "the issues" and stressing just how important it is to look at a candidate's position on the issues before deciding how to vote.

Certainly, issues are very important in politics, and liberals and conservatives, too, for that matter, are quite right in placing great importance on them.

But, frankly, our politics have become in recent years so infested with image-makers and polling gurus and a flock of other self-styled experts that only a mind reader can figure out where a candidate really stands on the issues and where his advisers tell him to stand.

Carter allowed himself to move noticeably to the left around the time of the Democratic National Convention in order to solidify his standing with the liberal establishment of the party; recently, in the face of some adverse polls, he has moved back into the center. President Ford, when struggling to gain the GOP nomination against the conservative charge of Ronald Reagan, cut to the right with all the speed of a Harlan Huckleby; having been nominated and facing a less parochial electorate, the president is visibly moving back into the center.

It's got so obvious by now that I'm simply sick and tired of any candidate who comes by and wants to talk about how he or she stands on the issues.

WHAT IS much more important to me is how the candidate arrives at a position on the issues, rather than the obviously political stand itself. In a sense, I care less for what a candidate says than how the candidate gets there and where he's coming from.



by PHILIP H. POWER

It's a preference for the process of evaluation and thinking over the fact of a given stand. Give me a candidate who thinks through the blend of fact and hope in a solid and sensible way, and I'll show you someone who is qualified to hold office.

Most politicians, after you give them a few drinks and get them talking candidly about their trade, will agree. A bright, young liberal democratic state legislator (whose name shall be omitted, because he's ambitious) confessed recently that he cannot abide his natural friends, his fellow liberals. Why? "Because, although I ought to be tight with them, I simply don't respect their character."

CHARACTER. That's what a campaign is supposed to be all about, and that's exactly what excessive concentration on stands on the issues ignores.

The public, which the political experts seem to feel they can manipulate so easily, understands this point all too well. Our politicians lack "moral leadership," according to a recent Daniel Yankelevich poll. Trust in government has declined from 76 per cent in 1964 to 33 per cent in 1976.

That's not surprising, when you consider the character defects of those who have led us for that period of time.

And that's why the debates this year will be so important. They will provide a setting in which the candidates, despite themselves and their squadrons of advisors, will have to reveal much of themselves to the public.

It won't be through their stands on the issues, but how they express them. It won't be through their disagreements on their positions, but how they articulate them. It won't be through their criticisms of each other, but how they put them.

In short, the debates will provide a means—at a time of terrible public lack of trust in the characters of our politicians—for us all to form our own judgments on their characters as people.

And as you watch the debates, you might usefully keep in mind the following question for all politicians: Instead of telling me your stand on the issues, why don't you tell me your hope, your vision, your ethic, and your analytical model of what's going on in this country which, in turn, motivate and inform your stands on the issues?

How to beat The Killer

Last week I wrote a column that could have been entitled "Run for Your Life." I told how Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the man who set up the exercise training program for the United States Air Force, which included our astronauts, had demonstrated that a commitment of an hour a week in a planned exercise program could save the lives of an awful lot of middle-aged men and women.

Heart disease is the No. 1 killer in the United States, and the sedentary lifestyle of Americans, along with their diets, kills a higher proportion of Americans than persons in any other country.

A former associate of Dr. Cooper, Dr. Joseph Arends of Troy, has set up a practice which he calls preventive medicine. It's sort of like factories' involving themselves in a preventive maintenance program to keep their machines from wearing out.

According to Dr. Arends, the principal causes of heart disease are high serum cholesterol, high blood pressure, cigarette smoking, obesity and lack of exercise. All can be controlled by an individual through diet and an exercise training program. Therefore, Dr. Arends doesn't believe people have to have heart disease, even if their fathers and grandfathers did.

HE STARTS OFF his preventive medicine program with a stress-test physical.

While it is similar in many respects to the usual physicals given at hospitals in that they take all sorts of samples and poke in all sorts of places, he ends the physical with a stress test.

The patient is placed on a treadmill that moves at approximately 3 1/2 miles an hour. After every minute on the treadmill, the incline (or attitude) of the treadmill is raised one inch so that the longer the patient is on the treadmill, the more he runs uphill.

While the patient is on the treadmill, he is



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

wired to various recording devices, and his heart and pulse are continually monitored so that he doesn't endanger himself.

Dr. Arends feels that you can't accurately monitor the blood vessels of a human being while the person is lying down.

—Chuck Hughes, the Detroit Lions wide receiver who died on the football field at the age of 29, had a massive heart attack caused by hardening of the arteries. He had had a normal EKG four weeks earlier during his early-season physical examination.

It is obvious that people's arteries don't pick up that much plaque in four weeks so as to cut off blood from the heart.

THE LENGTH of time an individual stays on the treadmill puts him in a category of unfit, fit or good physical condition.

Depending on the category, Dr. Arends prescribes an exercise program of either running, walking, bicycling or swimming on a scheduled three or four days a week to build up the body.

After the physical, he has the spouse come in with the patient and provides material on how to change one's eating habits to reduce the cholesterol in the system, if that is necessary.

Americans spend a lot of time keeping their cars tuned and running right. If they did the same thing with their bodies, they could wipe out the No. 1 killer in the country.

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