

Opinion

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Robust debate: healthy to have

A monthly peek into Bob Sklar's notebook —

IT WAS a classic example of democracy in action? Or was it? That depends on whom you ask. In a 6-1 vote after a public hearing Nov. 24, Farmington Hills City Council upheld the city clerk's Sept. 4 denial of an operating license to Un Cha Choe, owner and manager of the Tokyo Oriental Health Spa on Orchard Lake Road for three years.

Only Councilwoman Joan Dudley — ever a maverick and not one to duck controversy — dissented, arguing the applicant met all licensing requirements based on testimony presented.

The licensing request was the first considered under the city's tough new ordinance regulating massage parlors.

Only the Tokyo stayed open after Farmington Hills undercover officers arrested 17 Asian-born people on soliciting-related charges at five Oriental health spas in October 1985. All three Tokyo employees pleaded no contest. They no longer work there.

Un Cha Choe was not present during the Tokyo raid and denied knowledge of any illegal activities.

IN DENYING her a license, the city council supported the police department's conclusions that Choe deliberately falsified her application, misrepresented prior spa involvement and should be held accountable for her employees' alleged illegal activities.

Choe has no criminal record but faces a misdemeanor zoning charge for allegedly allowing employees to live at the spa.

"We determined that the character, reputation, moral integrity and operation of Tokyo health spa is adverse to the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of Farmington Hills," Police Chief William Dwyer told the city council.

A chairwoman he's not. But Choe's attorney, Milton Spokojny, apparently sensed a thumbs-down vote from the city council. The very morning after the public hearing, he filed a federal suit challenging the massage parlor regulation ordinance's constitutionality.

In contesting many of the application details the city claimed were falsified — the signature, the photograph — Spokojny argued the city was lending credence to value judgments, not substantiated findings.

ASSISTANT CITY attorney Derk Beckerleg — whose savvy demeanor belies his youthfulness — hammered on the point that Choe should be held accountable for the on-premises actions of the only three employees she had at her Farmington Hills spa.

Said Beckerleg: "I think it's a reasonable conclusion to draw that this woman... should have known what was going on there and probably knew what was going on there — and either ignored it or condoned it."

That was a convincing argument for many city council members — but not for Choe's attorney, who said about his client: "You are still innocent in this country until proven guilty. She has an unblemished record. And that's what you have to consider."

Then Councilwoman Dudley spoke — choosing her words carefully, mindful her dissenting vote wouldn't sit well with city employees involved in Choe's background investigation.

Focusing on Choe's civil liberties, Dudley said she searched her soul for defensible evidence Choe either falsified her application or indeed was responsible for the actions of her employees — and came up empty.

"It does not mean I don't have a great deal of admiration for the professional-



Bob Sklar



— Milton Spokojny

'You are still innocent in this country until proven guilty. She has an unblemished record. And that's what you have to consider.'

ism of our police and the opinion of our chief and his officers," she quickly added. "I do."

DUDLEY ALSO surmised that lack of adequate proof to get a conviction was why no charges were ever filed against Choe. "I just can't assume Ms. Choe knew what was going on — not in our country," Dudley said.

She stressed she was "terribly concerned" that illegal activities allegedly "were carried on in this business. I don't like that in our city."

In defending his vote, Mayor Joe Alkateeb — often a counterpoint to Dudley's more liberal views — objected "to any kind of business that is the slightest bit shady."

He then added: "So I urge my fellow members of city council not to get so technically involved in the legal mish-mash and 100 percent proof of this and that."

Dudley, a new attorney, didn't buy casting legal fine points to the wind in deciding whether Choe met the city's licensing requirements.

NEVER ONE to mask her feelings, Dudley calls it like she sees it. But she loses credibility when she lapses into theatrics. Still, she's a person of integrity and sensitivity — as is each council member.

Political philosophies aside, Mayor Alkateeb, Councilwoman Dudley and their council counterparts had every right to vote their conscience on Choe's licensing request without fear of reprisal. That's what makes a democracy work.

In Dudley's case, it's important to underscore she was voting on the evidence as she evaluated it, not on the skills of the background investigators.

As she aptly put it: "I would hope in no way that anyone working for this city is thinking that I am not backing their judgment or their professionalism. That is not true."

"I think that's one of the things that makes debate and law the beautiful thing that it is — that we can disagree without disrespect toward each other."

You may request agendas

Under Michigan's Open Meetings Act, you're entitled to receive notices of government meetings.

A public body must mail notices to people who, on an annual basis, request such notification. Payment of a reason-

able fee may be required before notices are mailed.

The act applies to all local, county and state governments. That includes city councils, school boards, and various boards and commissions. Apply for notices through your city clerk or school district superintendent.



Teflon presidency is over

THE PRESIDENT has enjoyed during his six years in office the benefit of a Teflon coating. When things go awry in Washington, the public looks everywhere but at the Oval Office to find the culprit. The president is too sincere, too forthright to be blamed for any major mistakes emanating from the White House.

But the unthinkable has happened. The president is indeed in hot water. The Teflon coating has worn off. If you needed any further indication, consider the fact that he has lost Bill Broomfield.

Watching the unfolding events surrounding the Iranian arms-cash to contras affair, we have seen first one leading Republican and then another put some distance between himself and the White House, between himself and the president.

When you see U.S. Sen. Robert Dole, R-Nebraska, on television chastising the White House and Reagan for selling weapons to Iran, you think that, well, Dole is a possible candidate for president himself and he's trying to put himself in a favorable light with voters.

WHEN YOU SEE U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Indiana, publicly call for the president to get rid of his White House confidants and replace them with some "big leaguers," you begin to get the picture that the Teflon is wearing thin. Lugar is the highly respected foreign affairs committee member the administration has gone to again and again in an effort to sell programs on the Hill.

But when you see Broomfield giving the White House hell, you know the



Bob Wisler

Teflon is gone and there is big trouble. U.S. Rep. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, is a loyal foot soldier who has represented constituents in rock-ribbed Republican areas that include the Birmingham-Bloomfield area, the Farmington area, Rochester and part of Troy for 30 years.

HE ISN'T dashing. He isn't exciting. He's not a leader. He's just plain Bill. But he's Republican all the way and certainly one of the most loyal GOP foot soldiers to ever serve in Congress. He regularly wins 100 ratings from the conservative organizations and backs the Republican administration on every vote.

He's been a point man to help boost Republican programs during Nixon's administrations, Ford's brief tenure and Reagan's reign. He has been an advocate of aid to the contras in Nicaragua. After serving 30 years on the House foreign affairs committee and as the senior Republican on the committee, he's looked to us something of a foreign affairs expert.

And as such he's being sought out these days as a person who can give a

rock-ribbed Republican, foreign-affairs savant point of view.

BUT INSTEAD of defending the president and the president's men, Broomfield is saying that the arms for Iran deal and subsequent funneling of money to the contras was "extremely ill advised and mistaken."

Those who made the arms deal, or anyone "who approved or knew of any arrangement to circumvent the law has done a grave disservice to the president, the Congress and the American people," Broomfield said at a committee hearing.

We hear day after day from one administrative spokesman or another that the president means to get to the bottom of the affair, to get all the facts out. The questions remain, though. Why does it take so long, why does it seem like pulling teeth to get any facts out? Why can't, as H. Ross Perot suggested in Detroit, the president sit his aides down and say, "Give me all the facts."

The president is losing credibility each day. A poll now shows that half of the country thinks the president is lying.

The great communicator isn't communicating and things are likely to get worse as the White House stumbles around trying to come up with a shield that will protect the president.

If you want to know how bad things can get, watch Bill Broomfield. If he starts defending the administration, the situation is improving. If he starts saying, "The question is, what did he know and when did he know it?" the travesty will continue.

GM shows no brilliance

LET ME SEE IF I have this straight. Generous Motors is run by brilliant leaders and proof of this is the fact that GM is one of the largest, most powerful organizations on earth. Or GM is one of the largest, most powerful organizations on earth and proof of this is the fact that its leaders are thought to be brilliant.

It's one or the other. I forget. I do know that a short while back GM showed that it was still a great auto manufacturer by purchasing a firm called EDS. This firm's product isn't clear, but it appears as though it processes a little bit of dis and data. I think the initials stand for Easy-Dollar Scoopers.

This firm was run by a straight-shooting Texan who, when he isn't on rescue missions, is being forced by GM to accept \$700 million so he will quit saying what he has already said.

SO, JUST HOW smart is this corporate giant?

It's so smart that not so long ago it induced some formerly self-respecting governors to play "Let's Make a Deal" on the Phil Donahue Show. The governors were vying for the well-ballyhoed



Rich Perlberg

Saturn plant. One governor was willing to offer the first-born child of all state residents. His bid failed, though, when he neglected to include a Jacuzzi in the floor plans of the training center his state would build for GM.

The loser in these sweepstakes was Michigan, which was spurned by the hometown business boys. As punishment, the governor was re-elected by the largest margin in his party's history. He defeated a guy who defeated a guy named Chrysler who is not related to those Chryslers but who believes, "If you can find a better political office, buy it."

The winner was Tennessee. One reason for its success was its strong educational system. This is the state, remember, that is most famous for the Scopes Monkey Trial and Minnie Pearl. This is also the state that thought it was going

to manufacture the world car of the future and is now wondering if there is a planet named Edsel with rings around it.

SO FAR, I've somehow been able to make sense out of all this. If I understand it right, the smooth-talking, straight-shooting head honcho of EDS shot his talker off too much and was silenced sort of, for about \$700 million. If he criticizes GM, he has to pay a \$7 million fine, which means he would only get \$693 million from the deal.

Some auto analysts are calling this another brilliant move by Generous Motors. These are the same analysts who buy Detroit Lions season tickets so they won't miss a game in case there's a sellout.

If Generous Motors was any smarter, it might have to shut down even more factories and lay off even more employees so that it could still make less money than Ford.

Some might think that I am writing a snippy, disrespectful column. To them, I can only say this: Maybe so, but I owned GM stock, this column would be the first step toward making me a millionaire.