

## points of view

## Out of balance

## Proposed budget cuts no joke

## "IS HE SERIOUS?"

That question circulated among news people both in Wayne County and Lansing about Ed McNamara's draconian budget cuts.

The executive said that unless he got more revenue — most likely from a cigarette tax — he would have to close a floor of the jail, cut mental health programs, reduce the parks system to a grasscutting operation and so on.

YES, HE'S serious, said Dan Murphy, the Oakland County executive.

Murphy knows budgets, and although he's of the opposite political party, Murphy is an objective thinker who tells it like it is.

"Ed's got \$217 million in his general fund, and I have \$270 million. Wayne County has 2.3 million people, and Oakland has 1.1 million," Murphy said.

My calculator says that gives Wayne \$94 per resident and Oakland \$245.

That's not an apples-and-apples comparison, to be sure. Wayne County doesn't pay for courts, but Oakland does. Wayne has an indigent health care burden that Oakland doesn't. Wayne's budget figure includes parks, while Oakland parks have a separate budget financed by a separate millage and park entry fees.

But those \$94 and \$245 figures give you an idea of the magnitude of Wayne's problems.

HE'S SERIOUS if you judge by the way McNamara was collaring legislators in the State Capitol.

I bumped into him in the lobby outside the Senate chamber. "We're doing one-on-ones," he said, displaying a list of names and checking them off.

No stump orator, McNamara is best in one-on-ones and small groups — the exact opposite of his predecessor, Bill Lucas, who loved staged events but skeddaddled as soon as anyone asked a question.

Day after day McNamara did this. Susan Heintz, the Lonesome Republican on the 14th Democratic county commission, carried the ball in the



Tim Richard

Senate Republican caucus. Heintz never blinked in discussing the seriousness of the budget situation.

"Personally I found most of the legislators were very aware of that," she said, referring to the jail and mental health cuts. "It's difficult for outstate legislators to look at Wayne County and say 'this is a problem we really need to solve'."

In other words, the facts and logic were coming across.

That didn't surprise me. Although he has been in some rough campaigns, McNamara never has indulged in bluffing or bullfighting as an officeholder — not in the 20 years I've watched him.

A FAIR QUESTION might be:

Why shouldn't the state tell Wayne County to bag it, to go to the voters for a property tax increase instead of a big hike of a cigarette tax hike?

Lucas thought about it. The first year or so he was in office, he faced a renewal for another millage and seriously considered asking voters for new money.

Then he dropped the idea like a hot potato. That was about the same time two Democratic state senators were being recalled for voting for a state tax hike.

There have been ideas tossed around about special millages for parks. Or youth programs. Or health care. Or — well, you get the picture. Everyone had a pet project, and no one had a solid idea that had a chance of winning 50 percent plus one of the votes.

And even if Wayne magically developed a county image like Oakland's, a local tax hike couldn't be collected for another year.

Serious? Darn right Ed McNamara is serious.

## Oakland Food Bank eases hunger in midst of plenty



Steve Barnaby

OAKLAND COUNTY — the mecca of Michigan's prosperity.

But all isn't what it seems to be in this county that dazzles with its wealth. Underneath the wealth are some facts that should make all of us stand up and pay attention during this holiday season.

Lots of folks in Oakland County need your help. While those traffic jams indicate plenty of folks are going to work each morning, at least 35,000 county residents are staying home — unemployed.

That's a pretty lonesome feeling when you know on Christmas morning your kids will go without gifts.

This year, 41,000 people in one of the country's wealthiest counties received some form of public assistance. That assistance provides the basics for three weeks out of the month. Folks on assistance are on their own the fourth week. Symbolically, Christmas falls in the fourth week.

THE HIGH cost of housing that you and I might stick our noses up at in middle class defiance, forces many families to spend 60 to 70 percent of their inadequate income on housing instead of the recommended 30 percent.

A house becomes a bleak haven of refuge when living in it takes food out of your children's mouths.

Last year, 38,000 people in Oakland County received food stamps. Those stamps allowed them to spend \$1.50 a day on food. Think about that. Turkey for Christmas. We're not even talking a fast food hamburger.

But what we are talking is malnutrition.

Sounds bleak. It is bleak — especially when it happens in Michigan's wealthiest county.

Sure we know folks are in need in Wayne County. And true the numbers are much more massive. But that's just the problem. Those in more affluent Oakland County tend to be overlooked.

But being hungry is just as bad, maybe even worse when you're forced to live on the outskirts of plenty.

YOU CAN help in a lot of different ways. And if you've got some extra cash you should help. It's easy enough.

Plenty of groups exist. Many you've heard about. One you may not.

It's called the Food Bank of Oakland County — an organization tailor-made to help the poor who live in Michigan's horn of plenty.

Nationally, the food bank solicits and receives millions of pounds of food that would otherwise be dumped or destroyed. You know, the kind of stuff that is perfectly edible but fails the test of modern-day marketability. If we don't like the way it looks, we won't buy it. So food producers and processors give it away.

The food bank also seeks and secures private and public grants as well as community contributions to aid the effort. Finally, it links up with those who are in need.

Buy yourself a Christmas present. Send a contribution to Food Bank of Oakland County, P.O. Box 636, 150 Osmun, Pontiac, Mich. 48056.

## Any driver who drinks is a potential killer



Rich Perlberg

IF YOU NEED a sobering thought this holiday season, you should have stopped at the MADD vigil in Farmington Hills Monday night. There by the glow of candlelight you could hear recited the names of Oakland County residents who have been killed in accidents caused by drinking drivers.

These vigils are moving if not always pleasant events. Relatives of those killed usually attend. It is impossible not to feel their grief. The wound is deep and the scar tissue easily dissolves in the simple emotion of hearing name after name of often young people whose lives ended too early and so senselessly.

It was at one of these vigils that what should have been an obvious fact dawned on me. For years as a

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that I, too, had been touched by drinking drivers. Probably everyone has.

A good friend of my father, a man who helped him in his early career, was killed in a car accident. The

other driver had been drinking. A woman who cared for my grandparents when they were recuperating from heart ailments was seriously injured in a car accident. The man she was to marry was killed. The driver of the other car had been drinking.

Notice that I refer to them as "drinking" rather than "drunk" drivers. It is important that the carnage of the highway not be trivialized by some obscure argument as to how much alcohol must be consumed if the driver is to be considered drunk. Tougher laws might make the roads safer, but nothing will help as much as the public realization that any time a driver has been drinking he is a potential killer.

IF YOU drink, don't drive. It's a simple as that but most of us miss

the message because, frankly, most of us value the privilege of drinking more than the chance that we will be responsible for a traffic death.

But it is more than a chance. Up to 2,000 people a year are killed on Michigan roads. At least half of those deaths are attributed to drinking drivers. That's 20 a week.

Cocaine. Crack. Heroin. They are all dangerously evil. But the agent most likely to cause despair and tragedy in your life is alcohol. Think about that this holiday season. Think about that when you force another drink on a guest. Think about that when your children look to you for guidance.

And then think about ways to put the MADD vigils out of business. That, in fact, would be a joyous occasion.

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