

points of view

Are personal rights just a lot of garbage?

THERE MUST be a way to bring down drug kingpins without grinding our heel into personal freedoms.

It seems the fine line between getting a grasp on drug and crime problems and invading privacies is getting thinner by the day.

Take items like a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing police to search garbage, the seizure of property for small amounts of marijuana under the government's new "zero tolerance" policy, and a push toward drug testing for employees in many major companies. We're hearing more and more about enforcement, and less about personal rights.

Don't get me wrong. The drug problem needs to be eradicated, or at least brought under control. Efforts to do this are commendable, but we can't forget to look at the whole picture.

It's a delicate balance. Although the safety and good of the whole is important, it should not erode personal freedoms of the individual. Our whole system is based on the freedoms of the little guy.

LOCAL LAW enforcement people believe recent public outcry about drugs and crime is warranted and have given them some important tools to fight the drug problem.

Police have fought these problems



Casey Hans

for years. Drugs, the crime they beget, and the efforts of law enforcement people are taking their rightful place on the front page.

The Supreme Court's "garbage search" ruling merely upholds an investigative tactic used by narcotics officers for years.

One law enforcement leader has a theory about why these court decisions and law enforcement crack-downs are occurring.

"What you're seeing is a reaction to all the outcry and citizen awareness that this drug thing is a major problem," said Frank Laubhoff, director of Farmington's public safety department and president of the Oakland County Chiefs of Police. "Drug enforcement's a problem — and we need an awful lot more tools than we have now."

Laubhoff believes the reaction is a boomerang effect from a previous lack of attention. "The government tends to underreact," he said. "Now,

when the problem's finally realized, they're trying to play catch-up."

ATTENTION IS drawn not only to traditional ways of approaching crime through law enforcement, but also to non-traditional means such as legalizing drugs.

A lot of new ideas, however novel or unique, are being debated. That's a positive.

The negatives arise when it appears personal freedoms might be in jeopardy. In trying to solve one problem — a nationwide drug dilemma — we may be creating another.

Which is more frightening: the fingers of crime that are spreading into

our lives, or the loss of the freedoms that we hold dear? There must be a way to best serve both; the ability to balance them rests within our democratic process.

Despite the problems in our society, we have lived through more than 200 years of diversity and maintained our freedoms. These newfound law enforcement tools must be used wisely and responsibly to ensure them.

"It's tough. We hope and believe the profession of law enforcement will take care of that problem," said Laubhoff.

I hope so.

Road crisis lacks leaders

THE WEATHER has taken a back seat to the roads when it comes to the "everybody's-talking," nobody's-doing department.

Think about it. You are at some sort of Oakland County gathering and the conversation doesn't steer toward heat spells, locusts, knee-high corn and other weather-related topics.

Instead people swap road warrior stories and pry each other for legendary scarred routes that are not traffic snarled and that are more highly prized than a Northwest Passage.

(The term Northwest Passage is particularly appropriate in Oakland County where focus to the extension of Northwestern Highway warily stand guard against efforts of developers and the Oakland County Road Commission to extend that roadway to Maple Road, then to Hight Road and then probably to Ludington.)

THE DAYS are long gone when people would talk about miles between destinations. Such measurements are useless in Oakland County. It is only seven miles from downtown Birmingham to the Tel-Twelve Mall. Travel time, however, can sometimes be measured in light years.

It is no joke that people who live in or have to drive through Troy think seriously about new homes be-



Rich Perlberg

cause of the impossible driving conditions.

It is also no joke that driving Southfield Road can be a figure of speech since driving implies forward progress, and you don't often see much of that near the I-696 construction site.

I've talked with people who alter their daily schedules so they don't have to negotiate peak rush hour traffic along Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills.

It's a story that residents of Rochester Hills well understand. Already besieged by constant growth, they sit in wait of the increased traffic from the Oakland Technology Park in neighboring Auburn Hills.

Even though everybody's talking about the traffic, some are carefully picking their forums. A lot unfortunately clammed up and were nowhere to be seen Monday when state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Commerce, tried to get the ball rolling on a \$25 vehicle tax that will be on the county ballot in August.

Twenty-two chambers of commerce were invited; five showed up.

All 27 county commissioners were invited; one showed up. This is particularly interesting since it was the county board, acting on a law ushered through Lansing by Fessler, who put the issue on the ballot.

MOST COMMISSIONERS have avoided taking a position on the issue. Most have said their job is merely giving the public the right to vote.

Horsefeathers.

This is a leadership question. If the \$25 vehicle tax is a bum idea, it should never have reached the ballot. If it's a good idea, or the best idea available, then the county board is honor-bound to vigorously support it. The public is not about to support a tax without the full-fledged support of county officials.

David Moffitt, a Bloomfield Hills Republican who was the lone commissioner at Fessler's gathering, said fellow commissioners are shying from the issue until after the May 31 candidate-filing date. Apparently they don't want to give opponents a reason to run against them.

County residents deserve better. Such non-performance of duty is something to think about the next time you are stalled in a traffic jam. Chances are, you'll get your chance on the long way home tonight.

Closed campus takes work

MOST ANY tradition having to do with spring is one to cherish. But one, born in the permissiveness of the late '60s, is dying a welcome death — well, welcome to almost everyone.

Finally, after more than a decade, high school administrators are taking back control of their turf. One school district after another is shutting its doors to what is familiarly known as the open campus.

The days of students running around town in the middle of the day, unsupervised, will soon be history in most school districts.

Closing a high school campus, taking away a freedom from students who have seen their older brothers and sisters enjoy, is a sensitive issue, the success of which depends on the skill of a world-class diplomat.

But it's a diplomatic initiative that every school district should take.

FOR TOO many years our affluent suburbs have irresponsibly allowed children to roam the streets with too much money to spend and with little else to do but get into trouble.

Many teachers can tell you the horror stories of students coming back to class so drunk or drugged they disrupt the concentration of the students who want to learn and the



Steve Barnaby

motivation of the educators who want to teach.

After all, it's tough to be in a classroom where even one student is sleeping off a "high."

Just as disturbing are the students who leave and simply don't come back for the rest of the day.

One of the diplomats extraordinary in school administrative ranks is Garden City High principal Geraldine Keissel. Other administrators should take a lesson from her.

At present, 900 kids from Garden City High hit the streets between 11:40 a.m. and 12:10 p.m. Beginning next fall, they will be eating and socializing within school boundaries.

To make it more palatable to students, district officials have instituted a committee of parents, administrators and students to plan the new cafeteria. Students have been given

tours of other schools with cafeterias. A bond proposal, approved by voters last year, will finance the new cafeteria with an improved kitchen and eating facilities.

THE GYMNASIUM will be kept open during lunch hour, and officials are pondering the possibility of installing a jukebox.

Rapidly, the cafeteria is becoming a mark of pride for everyone involved. Most important, the students, instead of just being told, were included in the planning. It's sure to be a success.

Other districts have yet to make this sensible move. The Farmington school district still lets its high school students roam. Clarenceville does the same.

Birmingham allows 11th and 12th graders to go unsupervised. Southfield is phasing in a grade each year. But seniors will still be allowed to roam.

Plymouth/Canton has a closed campus policy but is struggling with what to do with all the students. Some actually eat in the hallways. Unlike Garden City, the district hasn't planned efficiently. And that's too bad.

It takes some sweat to make a closed campus a successful concept. But it's worth the effort.

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