

Opinion

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O&E Thursday, December 29, 1988

Looking back

Editorial issues put year in focus

DURING THE LAST 12 months, the Observer & Eccentric newspapers have taken a number of editorial positions on issues that affect residents in all of the communities served by our 12 newspapers in suburban Wayne and Oakland counties. Here is a look at some of those positions and what progress, if any, has been made:

LEGISLATIVE ISSUE

Not surprisingly, a large number of positions dealt with issues that Lansing lawmakers were, or should have been, addressing.

- First and foremost was the need to devise a fair and equitable method of funding public schools. The O&E also reminded schools and lawmakers that it is imperative that the spreading problem of illiteracy be addressed. Unfortunately, a last-ditch attempt to change the funding source for schools failed and Lansing is still without a solution to the great per-pupil spending disparity among state schools.

- Legislators did perform admirably on two other fronts. A new law was passed to close a serious loophole that had made it difficult for a woman to bring rape charges against her husband. Another law gave Michigan residents more power over determining whether medical treatment could be withheld in certain instances. The Observer & Eccentric supported both bills.

- This newspaper also supported a bill introduced by state Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, that added criminal penalties to crimes motivated by racism, sexism or other forms of bigotry. The bill recently passed both Houses but, over the objections of Honigman, with provisions adding criminal penalties for "gay-bashing" pointedly left out.

- Last June, the Observer & Eccentric, alarmed by the lack of regulations, urged passage of a bill that would set standards for Fourth of July fireworks and their handlers. Unfortunately, that bill still languishes.

GOV. JAMES BLANCHARD

Gov. Blanchard, in the midst of his second four-year term, was at the center of four issues thought to be particularly vital to suburban residents.

- The governor received mixed marks for his last-minute proposal to revamp state aid by increasing the sales tax by a penny while cutting property taxes 25 percent. The biggest concern: How would this generate enough reliable funding to upgrade poorer districts without raiding wealthier school districts?

- The governor earned our praise for pressuring Michigan universities to lower their double-digit tuition increases, including an approximately 20-percent increase passed and then reduced at Oakland University.

- The governor also received praise for the innovative prepaid college tuition plan that caught on like wildfire. More than 20,000 people applied for the so-called guaranteed tuition program and more than 40,000 actually signed a contract.

- The O&E criticized the governor, on both constitutional and practical grounds, for pursuing state police checklines in the fight against drunk drivers. Better, we said, to strengthen selective enforcement procedures than to tread on individual rights which protect against illegal searches.

FIRST AMENDMENT

As one would expect, the Observer & Eccentric had strong opinions about the First Amendment.

- This newspaper criticized a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that allowed school officials great control over the content of high school publications. The decision, according to the O&E, sent the wrong message to both educators and students about the role of both newspapers and the First Amendment in a democracy.

- Similarly, the O&E opinion page was worried by the efforts of some protesters to prevent the showing of a controversial movie, "The Last Temptation of Christ." Having different opinions is one thing; trying to prevent other opinions from being heard or seen is quite another.

- Similarly, the O&E was distressed about anti-obscenity legislation introduced in Lansing. Far better, we said, to allow individuals to decide what they want to see and read. Save prosecution for those who use illegal methods, such as exploiting children, to produce magazines and films.

ENVIRONMENT

Quality of life is a major concern for suburban residents.



Gov. James Blanchard received our praise for the innovative prepaid college tuition plan that caught on like wildfire. The O&E criticized the governor, on both constitutional and practical grounds, for pursuing state police checklines in the fight against drunk drivers.

- State Proposals C and D on the November ballot allowed for \$800 million in bonds to be sold for a number of environmentally sound purposes, including a start on the cleanup of toxic waste sites and the funding of local recreation projects. The Observer & Eccentric endorsed both issues and both were passed handily by Michigan voters. The issue should provide needed funds to help the massive cleanup of the Rouge River, a project whose estimated cost over 20 years stretches into the hundreds of millions. The O&E has urged both state and local officials to give that project top priority.

OTHER TOPICS

- The O&E expressed concern for a continuing trend of voter apathy in local, state and national elections. Little progress was made, although the state did open presidential primaries after disastrous, and ill-attended, results with other nominating methods. The new presidential primary, which requires a voter to state party preference, begins in 1992. The O&E endorsed the primary without the requirement to state party preference.

- This newspaper was strongly opposed to casino gambling in Detroit. Voters in Detroit shared the feeling, soundly defeating the idea in an advisory election.

- Efforts to require drug testing for employees was frowned on by the Observer & Eccentric as generally an unnecessary intrusion into an employee's privacy.

- There was talk earlier this year of Tiger Stadium being moved to the suburbs. The O&E likes Tiger Stadium where it is, noting that accessibility is a must for such sports and entertainment arenas. The lack of such accessibility is painfully evident at The Palace in Auburn Hills.

- Christmas in public schools became an issue as the year came to an end. Some thought the holiday was being lost in an overzealous attempt to separate church from state. The Observer & Eccentric asked such critics to realize the proper place to promote religious beliefs is the home or church, not the public schools.

- This newspaper also sympathized with those who protested against war toys, but thought it unlikely that toy stores and manufacturers would discontinue these items as long as there was demand. We urged parents to put such toys into perspective.

- Finally, this newspaper joined forces with the many who urge drivers to "be one on" by affixing a red ribbon to their car as a message that people should not mix drinking with driving.



Need to know is right belonging to all of us

JUST really never understood the arrogance that flows from the eastern seaboard. It permeates the country. Sometimes it's even fatal.

Just ask the families of Southfield's LaWanna Thomas, Rochester Hills' Lou Marengo or Bloomfield Hills' James Fuller, along with the many other families whose loved ones perished on Pan Am Flight 103 in Scotland last week.

In between holiday merriment and meals you very well may have picked up tidbits of the debates from our nation's capital over whether passengers should be notified of bomb threats — particularly ones which target specific routes.

A lot of federal officials thought it unnecessary to warn the public that a threat had been made on the Pan Am flight from Frankfurt within the last month.

Warning passengers was all but forbidden, according to the Federal Aviation Administration bulletin:

"Information in this bulletin is solely for the use of U.S. carrier and airport aviation security personnel... and may not be further disseminated without the specific approval of the director of civil aviation authority," said the directive.

PAN AM agreed that the information be kept to "a small group of

We do have a right to know and to make up our own minds — no matter how much it inconveniences government bureaucrats.

people who needed to know."

Naturally, one can only wonder why the people whose lives were most in jeopardy — the passengers — wouldn't have a need to know.

This is particularly mystifying when a lot of government employees around Europe and the Soviet Union were notified. Most of them weren't even thinking of taking that flight.

The notice was posted in embassy cafeterias, for heaven's sake. U.S. intelligence experts thought the threat, which actually named the people who would be pulling off the bombing, was without foundation. So much for their acumen.

The state department's chief of counterterrorism, Paul Bremer, noted that the traveling public had to keep the problem in perspective because of the dozens of threats made every week.

Such arrogance is exemplary of the danger we face from many of



Steve Barnaby

those who govern this country.

We do have a right to know and to make up our own minds — no matter how much it inconveniences government bureaucrats. The need to know belongs to us all.

In all probability, most of those same people would have gotten on Flight 103 despite the warning. But that's hardly the point.

They had a right to decide for themselves and they were denied.

Governments should never have the final decisions on individuals' lives, deaths or freedom to know about matters that could have an impact on their futures.

Suburban Detroit is a better place because of the contributions each one of those people from our area made.

Now is the time to return the favor and insist that federal bureaucrats give back control of the country to the people.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Headline disgusting

To the editor:

I found your headline in the Nov. 21 Observer absolutely disgusting.

What that (accused serial) rapist did to those people in Oakland County is repulsive and deplorable and something those victims and their families will never forget.

How insensitive can the Observer be?

Marge Fredericks, Birmingham

Full-time mom likes article

To the editor:

I was surprised and impressed with Wendy Blackford's "Parenting" article in the Observer (Dec. 15). I had begun to think that I was the last full-time mom alive.

And while I do believe as Mrs. Blackford does — that children need the loving support of a full-time, caring parent — I was happily surprised to see those views in print.

Disrespect, disorder and disagreement are what I've grown accustomed to. And the funny thing is that those moms and dads who snub their noses at me for staying home "not

working," as they term it) are often the same ones who are surprised at how mature and advanced my four children seem for their ages. (My oldest is 6.)

While I don't have a title, I am a professional at knowing my own children. They gain self-confidence by learning in an environment where they know they're loved, and that their lives are important.

Yes, I want "quality care" for my children. I "buy" them my time, and pay for it with dollars not spent on luxuries. Sometimes, it's hard making the money meet the expenses. But it's so worth the effort.

You see, stay-at-home moms do work, after all.

Sandra Labs, Farmington

Environment needs support

To the editor:

It certainly is encouraging to see "the environment" getting the attention it deserves — with the passage of proposals "C" and "D" Nov. 8.

Hopefully, the leaders you call upon in your Nov. 24 editorial ("Environment — voters want it clean and green") will step forward with innovative solutions.

What disturbs me is the tone of your editorial. A "clean" environment, a "green" environment, is made out to be something like a rack

of lamb, or choice cut of prime rib. You order it, it comes on a platter a few minutes later and you pay the check on your way out the door.

That's not the way this problem should be approached.

For years, we've counted on government to do the things that are just too difficult to do on our own. If we count on government to solve these environmental problems from A to Z, we'll need proposal "C" times 10, times 10 again.

While waiting for "the government" to step forward with a grand recycling program, how many people have taken the initiative on their own? How many people have sought out recycling centers to handle their glass and paper? How many people have taken their waste oil and household pesticides to special centers for disposal?

Precious few, but congratulations to those who have.

What's really needed is a reaffirmation of the fact that "the environment" is everyone's responsibility. What's needed is a little attention to the fact that this is one problem that mushrooms in cost, unless everybody chips in a little — dividing up household trash, getting paper, glass, leaves, grass clippings, hazardous materials, etc. out of the waste stream.

What's needed is public knowledge that this public's responsibility doesn't end at curbside.

Phillip Ginoiti, Union Lake

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