

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Robert Sklar editor / 477-5450

O&E Monday, February 26, 1990

History lesson Schools: keep pace with change

WONDER WHAT history teachers in our suburban schools are teaching these days as history is being made around us?

Did they stick with the curriculum during the student-led Chinese uprising in Tiananmen Square? Did they stay with their weekly lesson plan as the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, promoting the domino effect among the rest of the Eastern block nations?

Are they discussing the Soviet Union's step-by-step march toward democracy going on before our eyes? Did they forsake that scheduled exam Monday to discuss the impact of the freeing of Nelson Mandela? That happened even as many schools were celebrating Black History Month.

Is anybody monitoring this? Does the principal suggest that classroom and history teachers hold discussions and try to help students put these events in context?

Do parents question their kids over the dinner table as to whether these world-shaking events

were mentioned in school?

Do middle, junior and high school students request such classroom discussions as part of their right to a quality education?

If not, why not?

WITH THE release of the statewide Michigan Education Assessment Program scores recently, a lot of attention has been focused — and properly so — on the reading, math and science scores in our local schools.

Until college-bound students began taking the American College Test there was no such statewide method to measure their knowledge of history — and certainly their knowledge of current events — unless someone took a poll.

Think about it. In the past, students studying American history rarely made it to World War II. Today, do they even get to the Korean War, the Sixties, Vietnam?

History, whether world or American, it still is being covered in the same year-long course. That's not realistic.

from our readers

Impressed with scholars

To the editor:

While scanning the list of Harrison High School scholars in the Feb. 8 Observer, I was struck by the number of basketball players that were included in the column. Of the 36 young men currently on the freshman varsity, and varsity teams, 24 made the honor roll, with several receiving 4.0 grade points.

I was reminded of a recent freshman game that I attended. Varsity coach, Mike Teachman, while watching the game was also tutoring a varsity player in math. I don't know whether I was more impressed by the clarity and caring of the coach, or the dedication of the student.

F.X. Cahill,
Farmington Hills

Bar group liked stories

To the editor:

Kudos on the very informative and upbeat article about Oakland County's Dispute Resolution Clearinghouse and Settlement Center, and about its chief staff executive, Molly Forward.

This is definitely a community service whose time has come, and Molly is the right person to administer the program. Her enthusiasm

and dedication are obvious.

The Oakland County Bar Association is in strong support of this concept, and we are delighted that the state grant will enable the doors to open shortly.

We express appreciation for all those who showed faith in the project with seed funding, but are most grateful for all the volunteers who are giving so generously of their time and talents. Thank you for a very positive article.

Kathryn Gilbert Sirovey,
Executive Director,
Oakland County Bar Association

Now hear this: Improve Capitol quarters

JERRY LAW was genuinely embarrassed. He was concerned I might burn him in print for his admitted mistake.

Actually, I'm sympathetic to Law and his fellow 109 members of the Michigan House of Representatives for the deplorable conditions they work under.

I could use some sympathy myself. I try to cover their deliberations and roll calls.

Law, R-Plymouth, thought he was voting on another Republican amendment to the Democrats' minimum wage bill and voted yes. Instead, he broke party lines and voted in favor of the bill on final passage.

"It's so darn noisy in there," Law said. "And I was on the phone with a constituent who was mad about roads."

THE HOUSE is packed into a low-ceilinged room, with protruding pipes, in the Roosevelt Building a block north of the State Capitol. The House's chamber is undergoing restoration.

Now when there's noise on the Senate floor, Lt. Gov. Martha Griffiths bawls out the errant honorables like a schoolma'am chastising brats. She admonishes them to pay attention to the interesting speaker. Griffiths runs a tight ship. Working there, I appreciate it because I'm trying to get accurate quotes.

Not so in the House, whose discipline is weaker and whose temporary quarters have a low ceiling that traps every conversational bubble.

Most representatives rarely talk on the floor. They vote, chat, do a bit of reading and sometimes take phone calls at their desks, which is how Law made his mistake.

I have the floor phone numbers of several members but avoid calling them during session because it



Tim Richard

Lights over the press section are so dim that a guy can get eyestrain. Next week I may take along a candle or a kerosene lantern for illumination.

can distract them during voting. We news people hate extraneous phone calls ourselves when writing a major story on deadline.

"We gotta get out of that place," said Law, who is looking forward to the renovation. Amen from the press gallery.

LAW MAKES a hobby of state capitol buildings. "I've visited 20, mainly in the West. It wasn't long before I realized what a terrible mess ours was," he said.

He takes along a video camera during family vacations. He doesn't identify himself as a Michigan legislator, just ambles along with the tourists.

"Most are run by historical societies. You can learn a lot of history in a state capitol."

"Here (in Michigan) you can't even find a bathroom."

"Most are made of marble. They look only 10 years old even if they're 100. The Utah capitol in Salt Lake City is so clean you could eat off the floor."

Michigan's Capitol is of gray

limestone, as leaden in color as a November sky over Lake Superior. As for eating off the floor, ye-e-e-e-ch!

CONNECTICUT has restored its capitol building and saw tourism rise from 10,000 a year to 25,000 the first month, Law said.

Michigan is in the process of restoring the Capitol Building itself, but there are great questions about whether to add an office building.

"Legislators and committees are scattered around. People can't find them," said Law. "Some legislators want it that way."

He would have all members' offices the same size. A legislative district always would be assigned the same office, regardless of who holds the office. Home folks could find the member that way.

Instead, Michigan does it union style, by seniority. After every election, lawmakers play musical offices as they move up in seniority.

THE SENATE chamber has been attractively restored, but I for one am less than thrilled about it as a place to work.

From the visitors gallery, the Victorian chandeliers may block your view of the voting board.

A senator voting yes has his or her name displayed in green; voting no, in red. But the all-capital letters are hard to read.

Lights over the press section are so dim that a guy can get eyestrain. Next week I may take along a candle or a kerosene lantern for illumination.

I'd hate to make a mistake recording a roll call.

Tim Richard heads the news service of Suburban Communications Corp., parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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