

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

Keep it up Cablecasts surprisingly good

THE SOUND was weak at times. And the graphics weren't always clear. Portable equipment obviously was being used.

Still, the production quality of the first three cablecasts of Farmington Hills City Council meetings was surprisingly good.

We applaud the council for embracing the TV cameras now, well before all the bugs associated with cablecasting have been worked out. Councilwoman Nancy Bates deserves special applause for pushing for the cablecasts.

We echo councilmen Aldo Vagnozzi and Larry Lichtman, who think the temporary equipment should continue to be used until permanent equipment is in place. It's important not to lose early momentum.

Sure we're concerned about cost. We're eagerly awaiting city manager William Costick's cost breakdowns for both temporary and permanent production setups.

The cost for a bug-free production might be prohibitive. Then again, it might not. Until now, the council hasn't even given Costick a chance to juggle the original "Cadillac-quality" estimate of \$80,000.

Whatever it cost to cablecast the past three council meetings, which dealt with explosive city issues, the money was well spent.

Improved quality — better sound, lighting, sight lines and air flow — can be made as revenues permit. There's no urgency.

ASIDE FROM council watchers and people interested in a particular agenda item, few residents ever just "drop in" on a council meeting.

notorious for lasting 4-5 hours.

After working all day, residents are more apt to turn on the TV to find out what their elected officials are up to than trudge down to the city hall, particularly in winter.

Besides, the town meetings of Farmington Township's bygone days wouldn't work now. Even 1 percent of the city's 70,000 residents wouldn't fit into the council chambers.

The city's Committee to Increase Voter Participation thinks cablecasting the meetings not only will foster educated voting but also interest and participation in local government.

"It's a fine opportunity to see their representative form of government at work," said Council of Homeowners Associations of Farmington Hills president Marty Krohner.

WE'LL RESERVE judgment on just how much cablecasting quality the city can afford until Costick issues his cost breakdowns.

Meanwhile, we don't discount councilman Ben Marks' request to know whether earmarking money for cablecasting will jeopardize any priority city services.

But Krohner put that concern in perspective when he addressed the city council Feb. 19. The issue isn't so much dollars and cents, he said, but rather, "are the people entitled to know what goes on here? Are those people who are shut in, handicapped, elderly or infirm, who cannot come to these meetings, do they have a right to an opportunity to see their council in action? I think the answer is yes."

So do we.

How state legislators skirt the constitution

BASHING STATE legislators is fashionable.

Columists make a career of ridiculing them. The Patterson-Anderson amendment crowd says lawmakers are incapable of doing the job. A sign in the House Press Room says, "No man's life and property are safe while the Legislature is in session."

Such impulses were behind the 1978 Headlee tax limitation amendment to the Michigan Constitution. Headlee's purpose was to tie the hands of legislators by writing light taxing and spending rules into the basic document.

The legislators won.

I HAPPEN to believe, based on evidence, that our legislators are pretty bright people. My exhibits are House Bills 5500 and 5495.

Recall, now, that the Headlee amendment says that if state government mandates any new service by local government, the state must pay for it.

How naive! Michigan has one system of state courts, administered by the Supreme Court. If the state creates new judgeships after 1978, the state should pay the freight — right?

HB 5500 creates new district judgeships by a slick method.

Subject to section 1875, this district may have 1 additional judge effective January 1, 1991. (Italics added.)

Sec. 1875. (1) The additional district judgeships permitted by this chapter shall not be authorized . . . unless each district control unit . . . by resolution adopted by the governing body . . . approves the creation of that judgeship . . . in



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other words, the local counties, cities and townships must agree to pay for their additional judges.

"(3) By permitting an additional judgeship, the legislature is not creating that judgeship." Local units exercise "voluntary acceptance" of "all expenses and capital improvements which may result from the creation of the judgeship."

That's how the Michigan Legislature outsmarts the Headlee amendment.

HB 5495 would legalize the 5 percent Detroit utility tax. In 1970, the state allowed the tax but in 1988 let the law expire.

A Wayne circuit court said it's unconstitutional and that 19 months of revenue must be refunded. So the Legislature must renew the act.

But there's a catch: Under the Headlee amendment, all new taxes since 1978 are subject to a vote of the people. So the utility tax, if allowed by the state, would have to be approved by Detroit voters.

Fat chance.

The bill says it's "intended to eliminate the confusion" from the court case and authorizes "the continued collection of the tax . . . The legislature . . . intends to validate, ratify, and revive effective July 1, 1988, a city utility users tax."

The House passed the bill and sent it to the Senate. And that's how legislators intend to outsmart Headlee again.

BUT DETROIT isn't out of the woods yet. There is likely to be further court action on (1) the retroactivity of the tax to mid-1988 and (2) the lack of a popular vote in Detroit.

I hope Detroit wins, and I'll tell you why.

If Detroit loses, it must refund \$100 million, give or take a bit, in taxes it already has spent. Until the election, it must make budget cuts in the tens of millions of dollars. It must convince voters to renew the tax. And it already faces a projected \$81 million deficit.

If Detroit must cut its budget, it won't cut the mayor's bodyguards, limousine guards, housing inspections and social service programs. It will blackmail those who visit and do business in Detroit by laying off 1,000 or so cops.

Detroit may have to be bailed out by the state, because a city is legally a creature of the state. The rest of us will have to pay the bill.

State legislators from Detroit point out, correctly, that they're not asking for a bailout. They just want to impose the tax on their own people.

State legislators are smart that way — smarter than the naive souls who backed the Headlee amendment.

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

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Know your customers

To the editor:

It was about 3 p.m. and I was delivering newspapers in one of the subs.

The air was cold, the sun was bright and the sunlight on the snow caused it to glisten like an unreal winter landscape created by a surrealist painter.

This particular newspaper customer did not have her driveway or front sidewalk done and there was one solitary set of footprints, now two-three days old, leading up to the front door.

In the middle of the driveway, about 20 feet in from the road, was a newspaper stuffed in a plastic bag.

I gingerly made my way to the newspaper, walking without breaking through but bearing faint cracking noises all around. I whisked up the paper and carried it to this sen-

ior citizen's front door area, where the snow had been cleared off.

About half way back to the road, I heard a very friendly voice say, "Thank you very much. I was afraid to go out there and pick up the morning paper."

She made my day.

Bruce Gabel
Farmington

The writer works in customer delivery for the Farmington Observer.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

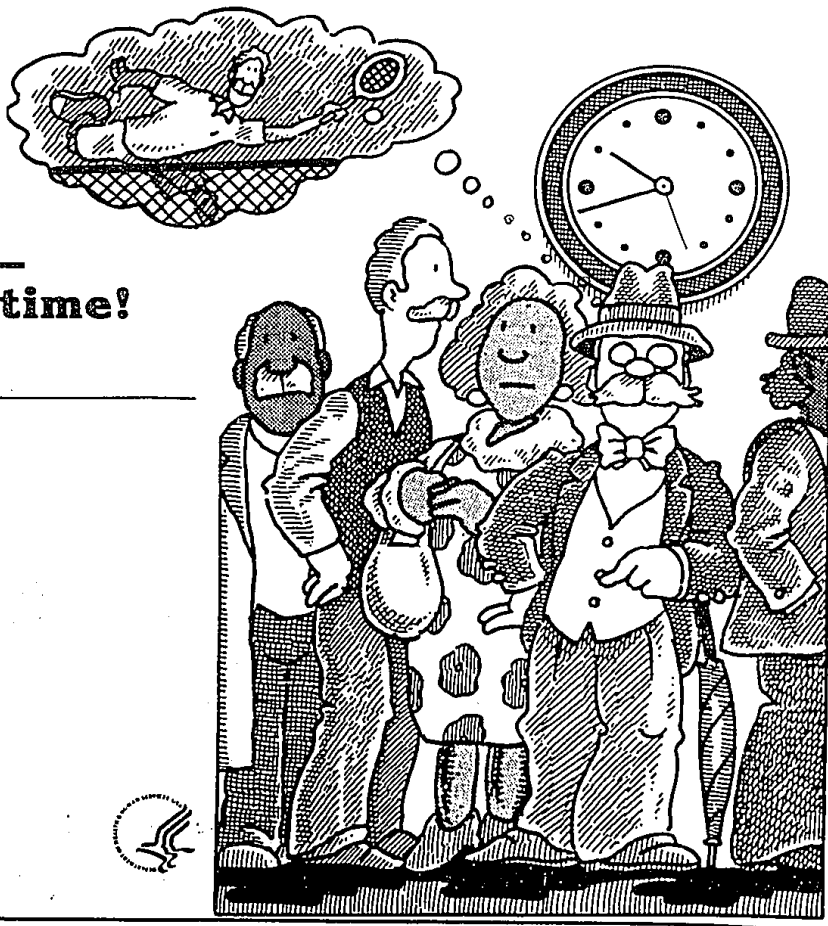
mation.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

Standing in line— What a waste of time!

Where would he be
if he had Direct Deposit?



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Social Security Administration

