

Opinion

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No-knock bill

It chips away at civil liberties

FOOLISH THINGS are done in the name of war. Chief among them is the willful suspension of our constitutional rights.

Abraham Lincoln came close to suspending the Bill of Rights during the Civil War. Ask Japanese Americans living on the West Coast how secure they felt about their rights as U.S. citizens during World War II.

And now we have a declared drug war. Politicians are ducking and running for cover because no matter what they do, they seem to continue losing. They're getting desperate. And in a desperate time, they're trying, once again, to do a foolish thing.

Michigan's House has passed and sent to the state Senate a bill that would allow police, with a warrant but without knocking, to enter any home. Today, officers must announce their presence prior to entering any dwelling, with or without a warrant. In deference to the Fourth Amendment, our constitutional guarantee to privacy.

House Bill 5579 shreds this right to privacy. It says if law enforcement officials believe, and can convince "any court of record" that they suspect drugs are in a private home, then anyone above the rung of magistrate and the judicial ladder can authorize a "no-knock" warrant.

THERE ARE two clear and present dangers inherent in this flawed bill. First, lawmakers are "playing to the population's emotions, calling the drug problem a "war" and implying that in the face of war, any measure is justified to put down the enemy.

The contradiction is stupefying, perhaps by design. Just exactly how does depriving citizens of their constitutional rights decrease drug use in this country?

Second, what happens in the future? Today, legislators are considering diluting a constitutional right to fight drugs. Does that mean that tomorrow, these same legislators will advocate the same tactics to check up on who's reading what in their own living rooms?

It's as though they've forgotten that 200 years ago, this country separated from England because of the Crown's policies on civil rights, which largely were nonexistent.

Twenty-five years ago, when students openly used a wide array of drugs on college campuses across America, no one would have predicted, or seriously considered, subverting our constitutional rights as a means to stop drug use. Yet, after nearly three decades of pent-up frustration

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and sadness over our country's seeming inability to solve this problem, we seem partially ready to turn on ourselves as a last, desperate measure.

THAT'S NO answer. We absolutely support halting drug use in America, but not by means that seem to rival the heat and hallelujah of an all-night tent revival. We do not want fewer rights and a drug-free society — we want more rights and a drug-free society. That is the basis of the free thought that built this country.

Look beyond the drug problem at something that is in its beginning stages today, and think of how "no-knock" might be applied to it, if it grows, in a decade or two.

Right now, a small group of people, loosely strung across the South, believes satanic lyrics can be found in rock and roll music. Their cause didn't have to be rational to gain speed, and today, they have succeeded in forcing some record companies to label record albums with stickers urging "parental guidance — graphic lyrics."

Putting this on a parallel track with attempts to fight drug use, does that mean that by the end of this century, police will be breaking down doors, ripping compact disks out of CD players and hauling off the unclean for incarceration as offenders of the public sensibilities?

Sounds far-fetched and much like the script of a marginally futuristic movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. But if we allow "no-knock" to go through today, then we can expect any other difficult problem we'll face to be measured by the same restrictive, backward, punitive answer.

GUTTING THE Bill of Rights serves no purpose. We believe such a solution bubbled to the surface because going after the end-user is easier than interdiction at higher levels — where the drugs are produced and the main access ports into this country.

Our solution is much the same as that of local law enforcement officers — education and interdiction. Bring the resources we've allocated to bear on the major importers and dealers. Pinch it off at the source, not on a hunch in our neighbor's living room.

Valuable pre-K program axed for money reasons

Q: I read your column encouraging a mother to hold her son back a year before entering kindergarten or at least put him in a pre-kindergarten program because he was a very young 5-year-old. You said it was especially important if it is a boy who is not ready.

A: Then I read a newspaper article where a local school district did away with their pre-kindergarten program because their evaluation of it showed there was no difference in reading and math test scores by the third grade of those who were held back a year and those who were not. Who does one believe? Why did this district do away with the pre-kindergarten program?

A: Test scores given three years later in the third grade should not be used to determine if a child is ready for kindergarten three years prior. There is more to school entry than how a kid tests out in the third grade.

I know the district you refer to; it is a fine district. Their pre-kindergarten (an extra year of school for those children considered not ready for formal schooling) grew from 5 percent to 30 percent.

The major problem there was that pre-kindergarten became so popular that many parents wanted to hold their kids back so they would be 6 years old and, it is hoped, the biggest, strongest, most experienced and brightest in their class.

In some districts it literally was becoming like "red-shirting" college athletes has become. Keep the athlete out of college football for one year so he/she is bigger and stronger by their sophomore year while still technically a freshman with four years of eligibility.

Hold the 5-year-old back a year and have a 6-year-old compete with 5- and even 4-year-olds.

The pre-kindergarten, sometimes called "developmental kindergarten or kindergarten, is losing much of its momentum because many school districts are revising their kindergarten curriculums to make it more age-appropriate.

Over the last few years the first and even second grade curriculum were being pushed down into the kindergarten. This pattern was especially prevalent in affluent school districts where children enter school with many enriching experiences. This parent pressure emanated from people with good intentions but who don't understand or don't accept the developmental steps necessary for children at this age level. The Japanese do and their kindergarten is a time for children to explore and to become socially and emotionally ready for their next 12 to 17 years of schooling. Shouldn't we give the 4- and 5-year-olds a break for at least one year?

Another major reason for the reduction of pre-kindergarten classes is the cost to the school budget.



Doc Doyle

In 1988-1989 I was contracted to do a study of the Grand Rapids Forest Hills pre-kindergarten program. The program grew from 5 percent of the kindergarten population to 40 percent. Forest Hills is a high socioeconomic community with informed parents and bright kids.

I found it impossible to imagine that 40 percent of the kids in this community were not ready for kindergarten.

The cost for more teachers to run the program in Forest Hills grew from about \$60,000 a year to

\$183,766 a year.

Since this program added another year of education (a 14th year for 40 percent of the incoming kindergarten population, the projected cost of the program by the time these kids graduated was \$3.8 million. That's a lot of money for teacher instructional materials.

The study you read about takes on a whole new light. The results are probably true but the reason that district dropped the pre-kindergarten program was cost, which resulted in a new and more appropriate curriculum approach.

Dr. James Doyle is a former assistant superintendent in the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

from our readers

MSU column inflammatory

To the editor: Having read and reread the May 7 column of Tim Richard, we are constrained to protest his insidious and inflammatory undertones.

The column begins ostensibly with an endorsement of the formation of a "Green and White PAC" to "improve" the process by which MSU's trustees are selected. But later in the column, Mr. Richard's central (and negative) thesis surfaces as follows:

"The process by which political parties nominate candidates for the MSU board, the State Board of Education and the boards of the university and Wayne State is amazingly casual."

"Democrats pick four men and four women. Interest groups rather than abilities are emphasized — blacks, Hispanics, Jews, the Upper Peninsula, the Michigan Education Association and, of course, 'The

Union" — the United Auto Workers. "Republicans casually pick gentlemen and ladies but use no solid criteria."

The public acts and judgments of our elected officials are, of course, fair game for editorial comment. This is so even when, as here, the commentator appears badly to have misunderstood and/or oversimplified an ongoing dispute between the public officials involved.

But, in times when our society is already deeply polarized by racial, ethnic, regional and class prejudices, impliedly blaming the troubles at MSU on an apparent overemphasis by Democrats on nominating "blacks, Hispanics, Jews," residents of the Upper Peninsula and union members for the office of MSU trustee is both far-fetched and irresponsible.

We urge the Observer & Eccentric to review carefully its editorial policies before it again unleashes Mr. Richard and his noxious views on the community.

Marilyn Raymond, Bradley Raymond, Farmington Hills



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