

# Opinion

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## Embarrassing Council behavior needs work

**N**O ONE is a saint. That goes without saying for the seven members of the Farmington Hills City Council, whose behavior, particularly in the past year, resembles more of a boxing ring than a public body deliberating public business for the public good.

It's one thing to disagree with colleagues even in the continuing 5-2 votes that have plagued any consensus the council might have. But this council seems to take delight in impugning each other's integrity, as well as the public's.

There is no wonder that the public has less than ample regard and faith in their local governing body. Issues confronting the city are overshadowed by the council's shoddy public behavior. And we hear the in-fighting is no better in private.

In the latest 1½-hour battle in the ring Monday over reactivating the ethics committee, council members aired their dirty laundry again: who did what and when and to whom.

The latest verbal battle was prompted by a six-part Detroit News series in October that captured attention with the mention of councilman Ben Marks and his reported financial associations with developers.

**MAYOR JEAN Fox** wanted — and got — the city's ethics committee reactivated to study — well, no one really knows what, for sure. We agree with councilwoman Nancy Bates' suggestion for a workshop on ethics before any committee is appointed with a specific charge. At least the seven might know what they're doing before they do it.

Rightly so, the council has agreed to appoint some residents to the committee. The city council needs some monitoring and should not be left alone to make up their own rules.

## Can the ads Let's have real issues in '92

**I**T'S OFFICIAL. Ninety percent of us disapproved of "negative" political ads — the kind where one candidate bashes another by distorting tiny details in his record. Only 10 percent of us approved of what went on in the 1990 campaigns for governor and U.S. senator.

That conclusion came from a poll of 400 voters by the Michigan State University department of advertising. They live in the counties around the East Lansing campus, but they responded much the way folks in these southeastern Michigan suburbs talk.

What we don't know is how negative ads influenced voters. Did a person incensed, for example, by the way Gov. Jim Blanchard portrayed John Engler's Senate attendance record vote for Blanchard anyway. That's still unclear.

What is clear is that many campaign managers think negative ads work — or did until the 1990 campaign.

**AT THE RISK** of sounding heretical, we suggest that maybe voters got what they deserved. Serious political debate is waning in our popular culture.

Every community has some kind of festival — a Memorial Day or Fourth of July parade, an anniversary spree, a fair. How many of our festivals ban political candidates, their floats and booths?

How many luncheon clubs have rules against political speeches?

How many clubs decline to sponsor a debate between candidates for offices lower on the ticket — say, attorney general or university boards?

Abe Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, running for office today, would have a difficult time finding a crowd, let alone an audience that would listen for more than a couple of sound bites.

Serious debate is no longer part of our culture. Back to the negative ads . . . another conclusion.

## Prime Time Report shows real problems

**L**ET'S NOT waste our time in slaying the messenger.

Metro Detroiters are in an uproar over the recent airing of the ABC Prime Time show outlining the problems of our core city — exemplified by the fires on Devil's Night. The nationwide television broadcast comes on the heels of the book authored by Ze'ev Chafets which focused on the same problems.

Whether suburban or urban, we all, to some degree, have a responsibility in helping to solve the problems of our metropolitan area. Instead

of complaining about the bad press we are getting, let's work together in solving the problems which lead to the negative image.

Business, civic and religious leaders from around metropolitan Detroit must collectively work together if a true Renaissance and economic rebirth is to take place.

Let's not waste any more time debating the ABC's of the news book.

Instead, let's work together to slay our problems — not the messenger.

**THE DETROIT** News series featuring Ben Marks and Economic Development Corporation member Paul Inman — among many others in the suburbs — opened a can of worms. That's good. It's time city officials looked in the mirror and saw what the public sees and what the public mistrusts.

But the fact that some Farmington Hills officials are once again mentioned in a negative light is not as embarrassing as the continuing spectacle this city council hosts Monday nights.

We agree with councilman Jonathan Grant who said Monday night that the competent city administration and staff could do far better without the city council.

**Instead of rejecting politicians, we must invite them into our meeting halls, our shopping centers and our homes.**

sion in the MSU survey was almost as astounding as the 90 percent disapproval factor.

Some 26 percent of respondents found negative ads "very informative or somewhat informative." That was too high for comfort. It suggests that one-fourth of us were poorly informed to begin with if we imagined we learned anything from negative ads.

Great Britain and Canada require that television stations give a certain amount of free time to candidates. The necessity of filling up time requires that candidates say something, not just flip out smart-aleck cracks.

American broadcasters would dislike being forced to turn over time. That's understandable. But it's a solution broadcasters might adopt voluntarily.

**TO BE CONSCIENTIOUS** participants in this democracy, we must bring politics back into our lives, not treat it as a nasty little aside with which we must coexist.

Instead of rejecting politicians, we must invite them into our meeting halls, our shopping centers and our homes. Now is the time to invite politics out of the closet, to replace an afternoon of football with a good healthy debate on the issues that have the most impact on our lives.

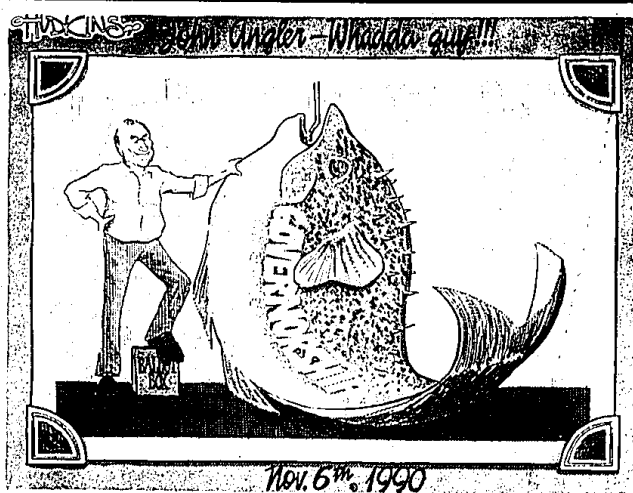
"Democracy," an old-time columnist once said, "is the theory that the people know what they want and deserve to get it — good and hard." In 1990 we got the kind of democracy we deserved.

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## 'Politics as usual' — it's not that way now

**THIS IS** a column about two politicians in trouble and how they got that way.

On Tuesday Gov. James Blanchard, who four years ago was re-elected by the biggest margin in the history of Michigan politics, was upset by John Engler.

Like most political campaigns these days, Blanchard's relied extensively on TV spots attacking his opponent. Blanchard lost.

Today the Senate Ethics Committee starts national televised hearings on the propriety of the five senators who accepted campaign contributions from Charles Keating and others tied to the savings and loan industry.

Sen. Donald Riegle of Michigan is one of those senators. Like most senators these days, Riegle actively and regularly solicited money from lobbyists and representatives of groups with interests in what Congress does. He's in deep trouble.

Both Blanchard and Riegle are paying a terrible price for conducting politics as usual at a time when most people are getting fed up.

**IN BLANCHARD'S** case, politics as usual consisted in deploying the standard modern technology of winning elections.

In place of the personal campaigning that used to give candidates a sense of what stirred folks — telephone polls. In place of loyal volunteers who used to comb the neighborhood to get out the vote — ceaseless TV spots. In place of the candidate discussing just what issues faced Michigan and what he proposed to do about them — a blizzard of 10- and 30-second spots attacking Engler.

**Both (defeated Gov. James) Blanchard and (troubled U.S. Sen. Donald) Riegle are paying a terrible price for conducting politics as usual at a time when most people are getting fed up.**

It now seems quite clear that the election was decided very largely on turnout. Engler built into his campaign an old-fashioned field organization that focused on identifying his voters and getting them to the polls. By contrast, Blanchard's campaign was based largely on media, with field work given low priority and small budget.

What happened? The Republican vote in the western part of the state came out, while the Democratic vote in southeastern Michigan languished. Had turnout in Detroit, for example, been this year what it was four years ago, Blanchard would have been re-elected.

**FOR DON RIEGLE**, politics as usual consisted in raising by conventional ways the huge sums of money required to pay for the new technology of winning elections.

Operating through his own fundraising efforts and through the network of other senators, Riegle raised nearly \$3.4 million for his 1988 re-election.

He started early on the next cycle, raising around \$200,000 from S&L interests, including \$78,250 from



**Philip Power**

Charles Keating, who had the misfortune later to be fingered in the national media as the sign and symbol of the entire thrift scandal. Instantly, Riegle and the other senators who took money from Keating found themselves in hot water.

It seems clear that neither Riegle nor his friends are guilty of anything out of the ordinary. The way politics works these days is that every officeholder is under the gun to raise tons of money for re-election.

And the best place to look for money is from those political action committees and lobbyists who have an economic interest in the outcome of legislation. That's why most political fund-raising activities are separated from outright solicitation of bribes by distinctions so refined that only expensive lawyers can understand them.

**JIM BLANCHARD** and Don Riegle are not evil people. When measured against the conventions of today's political system, their ethics and integrity are high.

Both, however, suffer the misfortune to have been officeholders at a time when the absurdity of politics as usual is becoming increasingly hard to sustain.

**Phil Power** is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

## 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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

### Why I voted for Blanchard

To the editor:

Soon all the campaign rhetoric will be over and we will be left with the responsibility of sifting through all the information to make the best decision.

The people of Michigan have a lot at stake here. With the way things are going on the national level, it looks like we are going to lose a fundamental right — whether or when to have children. We could very well lose our right to choose abortion.

Governor Blanchard said he trusts the women of Michigan to make this most personal decision. John Engler does not. It's that simple.

With John Engler, politicians would make these decisions and not women and their families. I think politicians make enough decisions about our lives. I'm not prepared to give them yet more power over people's personal lives. That is why I voted for Governor Blanchard on Nov. 6.

Leslie Davidson,  
Novi

### Dolan is our good fortune

To the editor:

The election is finally over. Thanks to the efforts of many, Jan Dolan will continue her excellent service to this community as State Representative.

We want to thank all of you who contributed to her victory by allowing signs, distributing literature, working at headquarters, donating funds and doing all the other various tasks that made Jan's re-election possible. (Those with signs, please store them in your garage or call me and I will pick them up.)

Our warm regards to Barry Brickner and his committee, who ran an honorable and positive campaign.

It is our good fortune that the 69th District will again be served by the capable and competent Jan Dolan.

Nancy Bates  
campaign manager

### Thank you for the support

To the editor:

On behalf of the Instrumental music students and members of the Farmington, North Farmington and Harrison High Schools' Band and Orchestra Booster organizations, we extend our sincere thank you to the community.

Your support of our annual "Tag Days" recently raised more than \$15,000, which will be divided equally among the three schools to enhance their instrumental programs.

We hope the community enjoyed our Band-O-Rama concert.

Sandra Rowland,  
Maxine McGinnis,  
general co-chairpersons

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