

Opinion

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More, more! Meetings should be on tube

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, the Farmington Hills City Council has been going great guns cablecasting its Monday evening meetings live.

Now it's time to let those cable TV cameras roll during the open meetings of the Farmington-area's other governmental bodies.

Farmington Hills' council meetings — which residents with cable can see by switching to Channel 18 at 7:30 p.m. Mondays — seem to have developed a viewership in the year they've been on.

That people are passing up commercial fare for the local city council comes as no surprise to cable TV people. Live cablecasting of municipal meetings has been a hit virtually everywhere it's been tried.

"People do watch," said Lark Samouelian, executive director of the Southwest Oakland Cable Commission. "Throughout the United States it is a very popular form of community access program."

IN FARMINGTON HILLS, cablecasting came along at a time when certain council members (you know who you are) weren't getting along with each other. There were frequent squabbles and some very dirty laundry was aired in a lot of Farmington-area living rooms.

"Monday Night Live," as the Hills meetings are called, was (and sometimes still is) good for a host, if not a civics lesson.

Now that we have an idea that there are actually people out there watching (thus justifying the \$82 a meeting it's costing), let's have some more of a real good thing.

Let's cablecast the Farmington City Council and the Farmington and Clarenceville board of education meetings. Even planning commission meetings should be on cable TV if they're important enough.

In many cases, money for live cablecasting is available through the Cable TV franchise holder.

Live cablecasting of municipal meetings has been a hit virtually everywhere it's been tried.

Equipment is usually no problem, either.

The big hangup seems to be a certain reluctance on the part of the city council or board members . . . again, you know who you are.

The reasons for cablecasting municipal meetings in other parts of what's known as Greater Farmington are the same as the ones for starting it in Farmington Hills.

We've mentioned them before. We guess they bear repeating.

OPENING GOVERNMENT to the people is the important thing here. It's the duty of public servants to make it as easy as possible for citizens to have access to government.

That means allowing the cameras to roll in the board rooms and council chambers.

By going on camera, the councils and boards would be doing a service to senior citizens, handicapped people and those who can't attend the meetings in person because they're tending small children at home.

The live cablecasts also would help cable TV fulfill its promise to provide subscribers with important local news and information. It's the old "local access" argument.

And let's be honest about it. Cable TV needs all the help it can get in this area.

So here's the future cable TV lineup for civic-minded Farmington-area citizens. Monday, Farmington or Farmington Hills council, whichever has the heavier agenda. Tuesday, Farmington School Board. Wednesday, tape of whatever didn't get on Monday or Tuesday.

Maybe they could run an old Tarzan movie on the rare Monday when the Hills Council isn't in session.

War cries Freedom is the right to dissent

WITH THE war in the Persian Gulf winding down, it's time for us to re-examine our views on freedom and democracy.

Most disturbing during this conflict was the attitude which dictated that we should be grateful for the right to speak our minds and criticize our government, but we should shut up and go along with whatever the government decides.

In Livonia, city assessor Ron Mardiros saw fit to call for the reassignment of Bishop Thomas Gumbel, a longtime peace activist who actively opposes the current war.

In Farmington, an outraged caller complained to this newspaper about a headline that described local reaction to the war as "mixed."

Despite the newspaper's protest that reaction to just about anything always is mixed, this caller, a valued reader, thought it a slap in the face of our troops to suggest the country is not 100 percent behind their cause.

FREEDOM is the license to express dissenting opinions, especially ones likely to offend the status quo. Democracy, if it means anything, says that all the people have an equal say about the course of government policy and a responsibility to pull for that point of view.

Unfortunately, the war on the Persian Gulf has moved some souls to notable persons, to attempt stirring emotions with which they disagree.

The attitude of a recent guest commentator printed in another area newspaper demonstrates the danger from those who wish to snuff out dissent. The writer paints the entire local Arab-American community with the brush of anti-Americanism for failing to denounce a West-Bloomfield resident who had been charged with the slaying of Saddam Hussein.

Anti-war protesters, to be sure, also can be self-satisfied and a little too sure of their own correctness. But, as yet, we've heard none of them demand that supporters of the war be deprived of their right to express that support.

THOSE WHO would stifle discussion — those who offer the wisdom that now that war has begun we all have a duty to fall in line and support it — seem to think somehow that because lives are on the line the debate that is essential to democracy should be suspended.

Quite the contrary. War is the result of diplomatic failure. Debate is mandatory — before, during and after. The public examination of our goals, and of our consciences, must never stop.

As for the attitude that any questioning of the war or related policies insults our troops, we say not. Americans feel passionately, and correctly, that our soldiers must never be humiliated or blamed for what our elected leaders ask them to do. As many were in the aftermath of Vietnam, but disagreeing with a policy is no insult to the men and women asked to carry out that policy.

If soldiers can face the enemy's bullets and shelly over seas, they can face the words "we disagree" at home.

Besides, there's something disingenuous in the assumption that all the soldiers in the Middle East support the war and expect the same from us. We remember news reports in the weeks following the August deployment in which some soldiers clearly questioned their mission. They have that right and so do we at home.

What might be most disturbing about all of this is that some people actually fear open debate. It's that fringe attitude again that democracy is not for everyone. Heaven forbid we should actually practice it.

Concern grows Urban sprawl draws reaction

THE OLD CLICHE OF living in a throwaway society has now evolved into the reality of living in a society with throwaway cities.

That's the concern of Edward McManama, Wayne County executive. And he's not alone. In Oakland County officials recently held a summit meeting to discuss the causes and consequences of urban sprawl.

In some cases, those are fairly obvious. Wayne County is facing the potential loss of two U.S. Congressional seats due to population loss. In outlying areas of Oakland County where the population is growing, attention to infrastructure needs like roads and sewers is siphoning off sup-

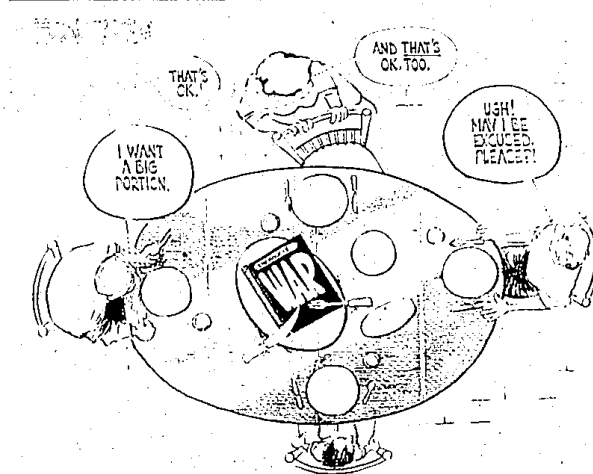
port for our older suburbs.

The combination of growth in new areas and abandonment of aging ones is a concern.

We are trying to head off something that could be a train wreck, said Joseph Joachim, director of the Oakland County Department of Community and Economic Development.

Now is not the time to twiddle thumbs. So Oakland County's establishment of a Regional Development Initiative is a good move. So is the team approach being set up by Wayne County.

But it's going to take more than talk to solve these problems. Resolve them before they grow unmanageable.



Engler seeks change in state government

Understanding whether Governor Engler is more like Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan provides a way to evaluate the core of a man who, to date, has succeeded in remaining distant and closed to public gaze.



Philip Power

ply of state government by cutting taxes for the rich and services for the poor.

That isn't the style of the cunning Nixonian tactician. It is the style of the Reaganesque radical.

THE PRIMARY conclusion I reach about Engler's governorship is just how radical it is.

Engler wants fundamental change in the size of government, what government does and how government is paid for. It makes his agenda unlike any governor's in modern Michigan history.

George Romney (1963-69) was a moderate Republican with a politician's skills. Bill Milliken (1980-82) was more of the same but with more class and grace. Jim Blanchard (1983-90) consistently sought the political center, possibly to his own defeat. John Engler (1991-92) was a transitional governor.

You have to go back to the earliest days of G. Mennen Williams, administration (1949-60) to see an ideological core and a policy vision as far-reaching as Engler's.

For Engler, the question is whether he can assemble a coalition of support as large and as durable as Williams did in his 12 years in office. *Phil Power* is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His syndicated column columns and appears periodically.

IT'S EASY to argue that Engler is a Nixonian tactician.

Engler's entire career since graduating from Michigan State University has been in the sandbox of the Legislature where the primary rule of survival is that skill in maneuver is more important than substance or philosophy.

There he gained respect as the ultimate insider, a master of legislative and procedural detail. His core was adherence to Republican advantage.

Even his come-from-behind election as governor reminds many of Nixon's style. Engler clearly understood that the only issue that could

add emotional punch to his superlatively organized but passionless campaign was high property taxes. And his media blitz over the final weekend showed a politician who understood polling data and how to capitalize on it.

TO ARGUE that Engler is more like Reagan requires looking at what he actually has said and tried to do in his earliest days as governor.

First, he consistently has said Michigan's government is too big. At some political damage to himself, he has cut programs — some because they existed rather than in response to results. He has eliminated offices, proposed to consolidate departments, laid off some people and threatens to fire more.

Second, he consistently has said property taxes are too high and should be cut. He has held to this position in the face of a \$1 billion-plus budget deficit. He has held to it in the face of criticism that he proposes to pay for his radical philosophy.

from our readers

Brave troops need support

To the editor:
At a time when the men and women in our armed forces are facing their greatest test, we at home are facing a test as well. Our test is to maintain our unity and resolve, as our troops are doing in the Persian Gulf.

We don't want Saddam Hussein to take this country's tolerance for anti-war demonstrators as a signal he should wait out our resolve in a long and bloody war.

I'm outraged at the brutal treatment of our POWs. And I'm saddened to see the media give so much attention to the small number of anti-war protesters who have sprung into action. It seems that every time a few protesters pick up their signs, the cameras swarm around them, and they end up on the news.

Our soldiers have said that they have a job to do and are going to get it done. I feel I have a job to do, too. And that's to stand up in strong support of our troops.

I want them to know that I and the American people are very proud of them. We are all inspired by their bravery.

I hope that you'll print my letter, and others like it, in the days ahead.

**More letters —
See Page 15A**

Thousands of local American newspapers are reaching our men and women in uniform every day. Your newspaper may be one of them. I want the troops to know that we hold them in our thoughts and prayers every day.

Ronald L. Hausmann,
Bloomfield

Thanks to 'no' voters

To the editor:
Thanks to the "no" voters on the last school millage. It's a no-win situation. There was no mention of the assessed valuation going up after the vote.

If you were a news reporter, you'd have been aware of this and mentioned it before the vote.

The assessed value on this senior's house went up \$3,500 last week. So the school board will get more money anyway.

George Stedekuk,
Farmington

Opinions are to be shared

Editor's note: A story on the new assessment in Farmington and Farmington Hills appeared in the Jan. 17 Observer.

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby
Judith Doner Berne
Dick Isham
Mark Lewis
Fred Wright

Philip Power
Richard Agnina