

# Opinion

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## Bad rule

### Don't dump childless coaches

THAT "CLICK-CLICK" you may have heard in South Farmington just could be the sound of briefcases being snapped open by many smiling attorneys.

And we know that somewhere the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy has a broad grin on his face. The Tail Gunner always did love a reactionary deed. Not to be facetious about it, but that recent decision by the South Farmington Baseball Club to prohibit people with no children on the teams from coaching or managing has got to be a reactionary's dream . . . and perhaps a legal nightmare.

Imagine that! Telling a person without kids on the team that he or she can't coach . . . just because sexual perversion connected with youth sports happens to be in the news these days.

The folks who run South Farmington make no bones about it: They passed the rule April 30 as a reaction to the case of James Stoller, the Southfield man accused of sexually molesting boys while he was a youth baseball coach in Garden City.

INCREDIBLY gruesome details are being revealed at Stoller's trial in Southfield's 46th District Court, and we know parents across the metropolitan area are paying attention.

"We just want to do things that protect kids," Roxanne Fitzpatrick, South Farmington commissioner, told Observer sports editor Dan O'Meara, who broke the story about the rule last week.

But what the South Farmington officials did is open themselves to all kinds of legal charges, as well as a mess over some very decent people who help make the fun happen every summer for a lot of South Farmington kids.

One such person is Geno Grabinski, one of the coaches affected by the rule. The 27-year-old is married — with no children — and has been a South Farmington coach for eight years. Unless the rule is rescinded, he's out after the regular season.

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Grabinski, who has never been accused of any misconduct, doesn't like the doubt cast over his character by the new rule.

"The way it sounded to me is we won't be allowed to coach because we're a risk," he told O'Meara last week.

FITZPATRICK AND the other South Farmington officials should see their error and take back the rule. Their concern is understandable, but their action needs a lot more thought.

And while they're thinking it over, here are some concerns about the new rule:

- James Stoller could have been a married man with nine kids, all of them on the teams. Using the same logic, all fathers could have been banned from the coaching ranks.

- If the suspect had been a woman, a black, Jew, Presbyterian, salesman, those with similar backgrounds could be asked to leave.

- If the rule stands, the cause could be taken into the public schools where you're sure to find lots of teachers without children in the system. And the school board also might stand a good scrubbing.

- Remember those senior citizens (their kids are grown and gone) whose lives revolve around these kid sports leagues.

- Good coaches will have to be replaced because of the rule. As one parent says, "Putting a baseball cap on somebody and sending him out there doesn't make him a baseball coach."

Enough said. South Farmington officials did wrong with this rule. They know what they have to do make it right.

## Priorities

### Clear heads can handle crisis

IT'S MICHIGAN WEEK — a time of celebration but also one of concern as the state faces troubling issues.

The slumping economy, however, shouldn't be used as an excuse to dismantle a state infrastructure that has served Michigan residents well.

With a budget deficit looming, this is clearly the time to hold the line on spending. But there is a difference between keeping costs in line and eliminating programs altogether.

Cutting funding for state fine arts programs, selling state park land and dumping able bodied people off state welfare rolls may be popular, but it sets a troubling precedent.

FINE ARTS is not for the few. State funding for art and music is the best way to assure that all Michigan residents have equal opportunity for cultural enrichment.

Selling park land likewise sets a dangerous precedent at a time when many Michigan residents and communities are diligently working to halt development. Keeping park land open, if only as a green belt, also makes Michigan a much more livable place.

Welfare, like other state expenses, must face

close scrutiny in tough financial times. It may well prove that dropping able bodied workers without children from welfare rolls will preserve programs for other, more needy state residents.

Still, with joblessness high — and with infant mortality rates rivaling those of Third World countries in some parts of our state — the need is clearly there.

IT COMES down to choosing priorities and the governor may not be making the right choices.

The trade-off seems to be cuts in social services and other programs in return for a boost in state education spending.

Even though increased education spending is politically popular, spending more on education may mean inflating teacher salaries in poor, out-state districts. It also may mean keeping small, no-longer economically viable districts afloat in an era when they should consolidate.

The governor's clinging to a property tax cut is puzzling in light of his concern about education, knowing that could take hundreds of thousands of dollars away from Michigan public school districts.

The budget deficit requires clear headed thinking. It's time the governor and legislators started displaying some.

## Lucrative

### Expense fund revisions due

IN THE WAKE of recent revelations of political misjudgments and conflicts of interest, the elimination of a special fund that lends itself to just such problems is long overdue.

A state Senate panel has unanimously supported a bill that would eliminate officeholder expense funds. The bill would allow officeholders who leave the state Legislature by a certain date to keep whatever is left in the fund or return it to contributors or give it to charity. If they don't leave, they automatically forfeit the money. That is similar to the federal law regarding campaign funds.

The OEFs give incumbents an unfair advantage over challengers, who are not allowed a similar fund. Corporations, which cannot contribute to campaign committees, are allowed to contribute to OEFs. Chucking this fund would further "Michigan's longstanding objective of eliminating undue corporate influence on elected officials," in the words of Secretary of State Richard Austin.

THE LEGISLATION would severely limit the

amount of money a candidate could spend at another candidate's fund-raiser. It would also eliminate uses of the money for questionable travel and entertainment expenses.

The bill to eliminate the fund has already passed the Senate, as it did last year. It awaits action by the House Oversight Committee, of which Farmington Hills Rep. Jan Dolan is a member.

Dolan said that she doesn't have an OEF and would be glad to be rid of them. But a lot of other legislation is getting attention in Lansing. The bill could die, as it did in the last session. In fact, one wonders about a bill that almost nobody opposes not getting action. The delay provokes questions.

Although this may seem like an administrative detail to some legislators, it isn't. They could help restore some needed credibility and eliminate a potential source of trouble.

Legislators should not put this off, but take care of this messy detail before it blows up in their face — and ours.

HAYKINS



Children will be children.

## Suburbs ignore unrest growing within the city

THE IMAGES COME back into focus too easily. And the pictures are always the same.

Scenario One: A young man stands on the corner watching the billows of black and gray smoke roll across the summer sky. For as far as the eye can see, the horizon is filled with smoke while his ears are full of the sounds of sirens piercing the usual calm of a summer evening.

Scenario Two: A bus maneuvers through a devastated city. The young man gazes in disbelief as he passes black after black of burned out houses and businesses. Olive green jeeps are posted at the street corners, each manned with an M-60 machine gun, silent sentinels watching over the rubble of a once proud city.

That was a lifetime ago, those horror filled days and nights in 1967 when Detroit exploded and it was forever dismissed in most people's minds as a desirable place to live.

CERTAINLY MUCH has changed in the last 24 years. It would be folly to seek similarities between so different conditions of today and in 1967. While many of us are better off, with our collective inability, or maybe our unwillingness, to deal with the racial situation, Metropolitan Detroit lingers in a strange limbo of instability.

The economic fortunes of the black majority have only gotten

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Steve Barnaby

worse since 1967. For those who remember, as civil unrest swept the country that year, many predicted that riots could never happen in Detroit. Blacks, the experts said, were better off in Detroit than any place else in America.

So much for the experts. Now we face a much different America. Short on cash, short on patience. The rumblings of discontent are heard in just about every corner.

The warning signs are ominous and once again few are paying attention. Some residents of the nation's capital scowls with rage and the police are called to quell the disturbance.

In Detroit a group of community leaders show up at city council to warn that with dwindling government funds, restlessness is sweeping the city.

"I think we're on the verge of that

kind (Washington D.C.) of uprising here. We won't put resources into supporting the community groups that are out there to hold everything together," said Wayne County commissioner Bernard Parker recently.

MAKING THE situation worse, we have saddled ourselves with a governor who has little understanding of the deplorable social conditions in urban areas.

And Detroit, for most suburbanites, seems so far away. Who needs it, many suburbanites say, with all its problems.

But this time it will be different. There is nothing left in Detroit to burn. The young and restless of the underclass stand on the street corners, waiting for something to happen. Nothing does.

And please notice, it is hot already in May. So very hot. And when it's hot, trouble is bound to follow.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## from our readers

### Be honest about PTA, say leaders

To the editor:

During questioning at the Democratic Club candidates night, Richard DeVries stated he was an active member of PTA.

As elected presidents of Highmeadow PTA and Farmington Area PTA Council, we feel it's our responsibility to set the record straight.

Highmeadow has PTA board meetings the first Monday of each month. We have 10 plus committees, eight board officers, and DeVries has not chaired nor participated on any committee or held any board office. He has not attended any of our monthly board meetings.

Not only was DeVries not active in PTA at the school level, he has not attended or participated in any meetings or functions sponsored by the Farmington Area PTA Council.

As Highmeadow's legislative chairperson in 1989, it was my duty to create and submit the bylaws to the state PTA office. DeVries did not serve on that committee nor in any way assist in the completion of the bylaws.

While DeVries is in fact a member of PTA, it is important that he not

misrepresent himself and his involvement in PTA.

Peggy Price, president, legislative chairperson, Highmeadow PTA

Sue Shapiro, president, Farmington Area PTA Council

### Sidewalks a problem

To the editor:

For many years, my wife and I have enjoyed walking around the various subdivisions north of 13 Mile between Farmington and Halsted roads.

Prior to the city providing sidewalks we were forced to walk in the road. So what happened?

The sidewalks went in, but who decided the route they should follow? If you will take this stroll, you will see where they dodged lilac bushes, veered around rocks, avoided scrubby pines and crawled under low branches.

As far as a level walk, forget it. You slope up or down to accommodate driveways, creating a hazard in winter. These walks are

never plowed. In fact, I doubt if a plow would be able to follow this maze.

It is my understanding that a property owner is responsible for everything within his lot line. That anything in the road right of way belongs to the city.

If this is true, then the trees, bushes, plantings and structures that are in the easement area, should be removed if they violate the proper routing of the sidewalk.

One section on Farmington Road is only a curb away from traffic traveling in excess of 45 mph. Much more is only 10 feet from the cars, with a good deal of easement space available, except for a bush or tree.

This practice is not just confined to this area. I have seen it around other places as well. Who is responsible for this and what is the reasoning behind it all?

If you think it adds to the charm of the community, take a walk in winter and slip on the slopes, or in summer and have a few branches slap you in the face.

John H. Emmitt, Farmington Hills

More letters — See page 19A

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