

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336 Tom Baer editor/477-5450

(BAPF) O&E Thursday, June 13, 1991

Cage the hounds Last-ditch appeals unwanted

THEY USED to close the bars on election day. These days we'd settle for closing the mouths of a few politicians and their supporters.

It almost never fails. Election day comes and people start calling in complaints about the intensity of the last-minute politicking going on around the polls.

Monday's Farmington School Board election was no exception. First call of the morning came from a gent who wanted to complain about boosters of a certain candidate who were passing their paper a bit too close to the polls at the Farmington Training Center on Thomas Street.

There were a couple of other calls . . . different polls at different polls, but the same problem.

Last-ditch appeals on election day can be annoying. Mostly you get unwanted fliers shoved in your hand and no place to pitch them. Well, we wonder if perhaps the political hounds shouldn't be called off and caged on election day so that voters may troop to the polls unmolested.

ONE VOTER we know happens to live close to where she votes. It should have been a short walk to vote. But she drove there instead to cast her ballot in an election last year. Why?

"I didn't want to contend with people giving me their stupid fliers," she said.

It was easier on her nerves, she added, to drive right past the gaggle of humanity waiting like grim panhandlers with their campaign signs and pamphlets.

They may be outside the legal limit — 100 feet from any door to the building containing the polling place — but that doesn't make them any less annoying.

Of course, these political panhandlers want you to look at their handouts or signs, hear their pleas and then carry the names of their candidates into the voting booth with you.

A politician (and those who work on his or her campaign) think it's so crucial to get in that last

You, the voter, went to do your civic chore after a hard day's work and you ended up running the gauntlet outside a school or fire hall.

word with the voters. And that last word should be . . . you guessed it, some politician's name.

MOSTLY, IT WAS annoying. You, the voter, went to do your civic chore after a hard day's work and you ended up running the gauntlet outside a school or fire hall.

Someone is bound to say, "Oh, what's the big deal? Your friend had to walk past a few opinionated people before she cast her ballot. So what? Isn't that the American way, to listen to opinions on politics?"

Well, sure, but our friend, along with the rest of the body politic, had been absorbing political opinions for several weeks before the election. Like most of us, she'd had her senses (and sensibilities) thoroughly assaulted with campaign rhetoric delivered in print, over the airwaves and through the screen door.

At least our friend voted that time. Maybe there'll come an election when she decides the she just doesn't need the aggra . . . and she'll just drive past the polling place on election day.

No, it's time for an iron rule in the form of a state law. Let's just ban all politicking on election day.

The issue gets the gaggle away from the polls. Get the signs off the boob tube and take down those signs. That's right, take 'em down before election day! Only public service spots ("Don't forget to vote!") should be allowed.

Give us a break, pols and friends of pols. The voters have looked and listened for weeks and weeks. Now give them a chance to vote in peace.

Move forward Ending racism starts with talks

RESPONDING TO recent racially charged conflicts in Birmingham, the North Oakland NAACP has called for a community dialogue.

We welcome the call. Our troubling legacy of racism and prejudice, throughout America and right here in metropolitan Detroit, can be overcome only through persistent attention to the complexities of the problems and a resolve not to become cynical in the face of them.

The incidents at hand — one in which an all-too-familiar epithet was painted on the garage door of a black family, the other involving a white man who allegedly threatened a black youth with a shotgun in a downtown parking garage — show that we still haven't crossed the first and most basic hurdles before us.

The discussion called for by the NAACP — scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, June 20, at Birmingham's Baldwin Library — will bring together area business and civic leaders and, it's hoped, the public. It will be an opportunity for everyone to learn, for everyone to move a little bit forward together rather than to fall back a little more.

THE PROCESS BEGINS with respect. It's been said again and again, but apparently some people haven't gotten the point: Fear, hatred and distrust directed at broad racial, ethnic and religious groups is insidious. Bigoted expressions reverberate a long time and come back to haunt us in many ways.

Most people know this. Still there are fears and prejudices that don't quite qualify as bald-faced bigotry, but which result in the ugly little injustices that occur everyday in places like Birmingham, Farmington and Livonia, and which postpone the eventual day when racism will no longer plague us.



Our troubling legacy of racism and prejudice can be overcome only through persistent attention to the complexities of the problems and a resolve not to become cynical in the face of them.

In Farmington several years ago, for example, the house of a biracial family was spray painted with racial epithets and the black husband was racially taunted in public. No one was ever arrested.

We ask not that our neighbors in the Wayne and Oakland County suburbs tolerate, as some sort of good deed, blacks and other minorities. Rather, we say it's time for suburbanites to recognize that our communities benefit from diversity and welcome those who historically have been excluded from them. They'll see that neighborhoods composed of people from a variety of backgrounds are more vital and interesting than our sometimes-too-sterile enclaves.

But if that's not persuasive, there's the simple matter of justice. If America means anything at all, it means people have a right to pursue their happiness in any community without having epithets painted on their garages or being made to feel uncomfortable on suburban streets and stores.

OVERCOMING PERSONAL prejudice in the suburbs, however, solves only part of the problem. It also may be pervasive in the ranks of suburban police departments who often are said to target minorities in the guise of doing their job. Talk to blacks who live in the suburbs. Ask them how often they've been pulled over — even on their own streets.

Among departments cited by the NAACP for having a large number of incidents reported of mistreating blacks are those in Livonia and the Farmington Hills areas.

Without urgent attention from all levels of government, the nation's cities will continue to be home to an increasingly worse-off black underclass. We all have an interest and a responsibility in preventing this from happening.

Much is needed, more than can be addressed here, but nothing is needed more than a widespread understanding of the role racial injustice has played in our society.

For that, the NAACP dialogue seems a good starting point. We hope to see you and your family there.



State disaster nears, but solution in sight

"THERE IS great disorder under Heaven. The situation is excellent."

So said Mao tse-tung, contemplating China's breakdown and looking forward to building anew out of the ruins. Generations have learned this political truth: Things have to get pretty bad before anything serious can be done.

The same in Michigan: Even after contentious budget cuts, the state faces a deficit of \$300 million to \$654 million, depending on whose numbers you pick.

There is a political breakdown. Republican Gov. John Engler waves an empty wallet, saying Michigan is out of cash. House Democrats sue, claiming he violated the state constitution, and they may win in court.

So partisan is the debate that both sides exert every effort to set up the other for blame when disaster hits.

Disaster is near. Payments to schools, universities and cities are late, and future ones are in doubt. A repetition of the payless paydays of the 1950s is possible.

THE GOVERNOR and Legislature are so preoccupied with partisan advantage that there is no hope they will do much more than fuss at the edges of the problem.

That brings us to another old truth of political philosophy: The American political system of separated powers is magnificent at accommodating contending pressures at the margins, but usually hopeless at doing anything significant unless facing a catastrophe.

When that happens, the political

Disaster is near. Payments to schools, universities and cities are late, and future ones are in doubt. A repetition of the payless paydays of the 1950s is possible.

system tosses the problem to another institution, usually the courts. Two examples:

• For generations, legalized segregation was the shame of America. The political system was unable (unwilling) to do anything. It took the U.S. Supreme Court to declare segregation illegal and set the country on the remedial path.

• A abortion couldn't be handled by political devices. Legislatures pass laws; governors veto them; politicians fume. The problem can only be resolved by the Supreme Court ruling one way or the other.

Is there a way out of Michigan's grave financial problems? I believe there is.

READ THESE words: "Leaders in both the Executive and Legislative Branches of Michigan state government recognized that further steps would have to be taken to cope with the serious economic problems of state government brought on by the forces of inflation, unemployment and recession."



Philip Power

Sound like today? These words were written in 1975.

They led to the creation of the Michigan Efficiency Task Force, a nonpartisan group of our most distinguished and able citizens. They were to examine the workings of state government and recommend ways to reduce waste and expense and increase efficiency.

Chaired by retiring General Motors vice president Oscar Lundin and including people like Alan Schwartz, Martha Griffiths and Doug Fraser, the task force analyzed more than a year. Of its recommendations, 155 were adopted. Total benefits: more than \$155 million each year and serious streamlining of state government.

I believe the time has come for both the governor and Legislature to jointly convene a similar task force. Only in this way can the best minds of our state come together in a nonpartisan atmosphere, to resolve the significant problems of structure and finance of our state government.

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

from our readers

Thanks for your help with millage

To the editor:
On behalf of the Say Yes to Parks Committee, and the citizens of Farmington Hills, we would like to extend our thanks and appreciation for your help during the recent successful campaign to renew the city's Parks and Recreation millage.

The victory margin (4,130 to 2,808) is certainly indicative of your personal contribution and involvement. So many people supported this effort that it will be difficult for us to reach each and everyone of them.

Your help deserves a special word of thanks, and we hope that you will go to help us spread the thanks to others who may have helped also.

Literally hundreds contributed to this success by either serving on the committee, contributing financially, making phone calls, working the polls, sending literature, preparing a mailing or calling lists, stuffing envelopes or generally promoting a yes vote.

Over 10,000 potential yes voters were identified and over 16,000 pieces of literature were mailed to voters.

Another 1,900 postcard reminders were mailed, and nearly 2,000 phone calls were made to voters. All of

these efforts contributed greatly to the yes vote and could not have been accomplished without your help.

Again, please accept our sincere thanks for your help and participation.

Mike Horner,
Aldo Vagnozzi,
Dan Potter,
Denise Fitzgerald

Candidate says thanks

To the editor:
I sincerely thank all the voters, especially my friends and supporters, for their part in the Farmington School Board campaign.

It was a very rewarding experience for me. I touched a nerve in this community. I had a chance to talk with many people about what they expect from their schools. I will continue to encourage more citizen involvement in the schools and a stronger community voice in making school policy.

I will continue to be active in my neighborhood schools. I will continue to do all I can to help our youth reach their full potential and be productive citizens.

Our children may be just 24 percent of the population, but they are 100 percent of the future. Their edu-

More letters — See Page 19A

cation is the single most important responsibility our community has. I am proud to play a small part in that education. I urge others to do the same.

Laura Myers,
Farmington

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in the From Our Readers column.

Submitting a letter to the editor for publication is easy. Letters should be typewritten or printed legibly and kept to 300 words. Letters must be signed and include the address of the sender.

Letters should be mailed to: the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Judith Doney Berne assistant managing editor
Dick Lehman general manager
Mark Lewis director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Aginian president