

Opinion

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Crack down! Cops must stop carjacking

YES, CHIEF Bill Dwyer, we do need some sort of an undercover police task force to deal with these so-called "carjackings" that have been plaguing the metropolitan area.

Thanks for suggesting that — with more than 250 vehicles taken at gunpoint and a couple of motorists shot dead when they tried to resist — something has to be done.

It's amazing to us that this carjacking has gone on so long and so many victims have piled up before one of our public officials finally said, even if not in so many words, "For God's sake, let's do something about it!"

Call the task force **STRESS**, if you like, Mr. Police Chief. Call it anything you want (we, the frightened citizens of metropolitan Detroit, would call it **RELIEF**), but get it going now and start making the bad guys suffer. That's your job.

The carjacking crime wave has been cresting for about a month now, and if you've not heard about it, you must not be a reader of newspapers or a watcher of TV news at 6 and 11.

THE VICTIM might be pumping gas, waiting in the drive-through line of a fast-food place, or just stopped at a traffic signal. The bad guys come along, stick a gun in the driver's face and take off with his car and cash.

Of course, some drivers resist (they probably worked damn hard to earn the money for that car and get a bit peeved when some scumbag drives off with it) and are sometimes shot dead or wounded for their bravery.

Some drivers just lose their cars — and are left to fend for themselves on foot in one of the worst urban hell holes on Earth.

Carjackings started in the City of Detroit and most of the incidents take place there. But, alas, the criminals of the '90s don't need King Coleman to tell them to "hit the road . . . hit Eight Mile Road."

By its very nature, a crime involving autos was bound to roll into Oakland County, and that

The lucky ones just lose their cars . . . and are left to fend for themselves on foot in one of the worst urban hell holes on Earth.

happened eventually. An armed robbery/auto theft occurred in Bloomfield Township Aug. 24, and an attempted one took place on Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills last week.

IT WAS THE Northwestern Highway incident which prompted Dwyer's suggestion about the police task force.

At a recent press conference with the lights ablaze and the cameras rolling, the chief said he wants a task force comprised of officers from the suburban departments, Oakland County Sheriff's Department and the Michigan State Police.

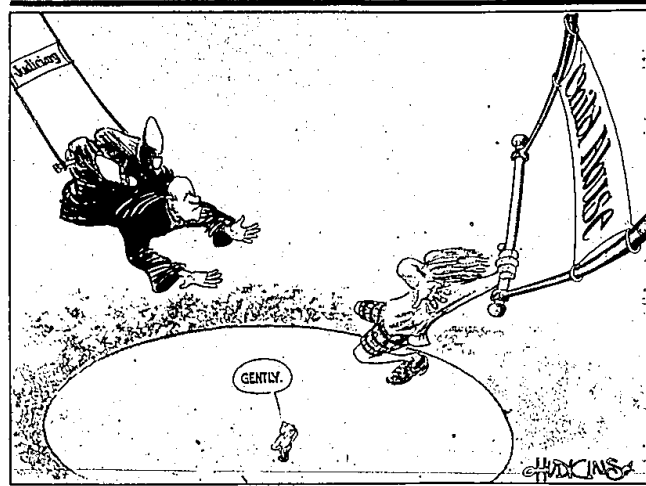
Task force members would study crime patterns and analyze evidence to determine which areas might be targeted by thieves. Officers would work in plainclothes and a decoy program could be established. The officers would pose as potential victims on the roadways.

"This could be a major deterrent, if they (thieves) believe these kinds of units are out there," Dwyer said.

Good ideas . . . but enough talk. It's time for action. Whatever the failings of Dwyer's plan, it's infinitely better than hearing some wimp of a public official say, "Well, lock your doors and roll up your windows. Bad things do happen out there."

Sad but true. Carjacking is a horrible crime, but an even worse one is for authorities to sit back in horror do nothing about it.

Come on, now. We, the law-abiding citizens of metropolitan Detroit, certainly don't deserve to be terrorized by every piece of human trash that can wield a gun or knife.



Both parties to pander to public with tax cuts

LAST WEEK brought Gov. John Engler's plan to cut property taxes for school operations by 30 percent over five years and to limit annual increases in assessments to 3 percent or less.

It's unclear how his plan (which will cost more than \$8 billion in state revenue over five years) would be funded. What would replace the schools' lost property taxes?

This followed by some weeks the Democratic plan to cut homeowners' property taxes and pay for it by repealing the capital acquisition deduction of the single business tax and a whole raft of industrial tax abatement.

It's unclear in this proposal what would be used to stimulate private business investment or contribute to job growth in Michigan.

Both political parties are in a pandering rush to cut taxes. Both proposals are to be on the November 1992 ballot, suggesting both parties are more interested in campaign rhetoric than in genuine tax relief.

It sounds like deja vu all over again.

REMEMBER 1981, the early days of the Reagan Administration in Washington? The cry was that income taxes were too high. And they were.

Let by budget director Dave Stockman, former Michigan congressman, the administration proposed the largest single tax rate cut in American history. Democrats

rushed to submit their own cuts.

Stockman himself later admitted the new law guaranteed the largest growth in national deficits in American history.

Two consequences:

First, the federal government systematically sloughed off responsibility for all kinds of programs, from education to housing, onto the states and local governments. Today's result: Chronic, severe financial crisis in states like Michigan and even a city bankruptcy in Bridgeport, Conn.

SECOND, EQUALLY important, was the budgetary straitjacket into which virtually all government programs were jammed.

Want to build bridges? Educate poor kids? Provide another 13 weeks of unemployment to workers laid off during the recession? No money. Sorry.

Later it became clear that some canny folk on the political right had this outcome in mind all along. They reasoned, correctly, that if the country could be thrown into a large and persistent deficit through excessive tax cuts, there would be no money left for activities of government, both useful and not so useful.

Last year the price to achieve a (read my lips) modest tax increase and a balanced budget was an agreement between Congress and the White House that new spending would have to be accompanied by specific increased revenues.

Could some clever people around



Gov. Engler have devised the same strategy for Michigan? Rush to compete with Democrats in pandering to middle-income taxpayers, they reason, because at day's end no money will be left to drive state government.

NO DOUBT Michigan's tax structure relies too heavily on the property tax. No doubt a lot of state spending is either wasted or yields dubious outcomes.

But does it follow that nothing done by government is useful? Are good schools a waste? Is job training for our workers useless? Should state colleges be ignored? Is it pointless to clean our lakes and preserve our woods?

Not at all. To ask these questions is to answer them. People ought to ask the question and those around him what they have in mind when they want to cut state revenue by more than \$1 billion a year for the next five years.

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

Child abuse Cases require training, funds

Recent child abuse cases still plague us. But the recognition that these cases require special training for the judges involved is needed, along with ways to further protect the victims of child abuse.

Michigan law now provides clear guidelines on what constitutes physical and sexual abuse of children. Many county prosecuting attorneys will have one or several staff members who specialize in child abuse cases. That has helped prosecutors more effectively pursue such cases and allowed them to work with the victim on a one-to-one basis, rather than shuffle a child to another, already a victim from one official to another.

The state's child abuse statute also provides penalties that reflect a crime whose victims are sometimes too young even to speak, much less know how to seek protection.

ALTHOUGH MANY judges have become familiar with child abuse cases, they often lack the training needed to properly try such cases. Although testifying in court is often the best therapy for young abuse victims, judges need to understand that questions must be phrased in a way the child can understand.

Judges must also understand that the courtroom is an intimidating place for a child facing his alleged abuser, including the imposing figure of a judge, sitting on high, dressed in black robes. Some judges actually step down from the bench to question the child in a less formal way, setting the child at ease.

There are also some changes needed to current laws to help prevent the crime and determine if abuse has taken place.

State Sen. Michael Bouchard has introduced a bill that requires a criminal history check for anyone employed in the child care field, from

day care centers to schools. The check would turn up any felony convictions or misdemeanor convictions that involve a sexual offense or child abuse.

ANOTHER NEEDED change to the child protection law would require that police be contacted if there is an injury to a child that could be a result of abuse. Police see many cases where children's injuries are not recognized as abuse.

But not all legislative remedies are good ones. Bills that would require prosecutors to represent the Department of Social Services will not make trying abuse cases easier or serve the victim. They will only encumber the proceedings and give DSS bureaucrats more sway in the courts.

And the one aspect of child abuse that gets short shrift is prevention. The state should continue to put money into the child protection fund. Taxpayers should support the fund by donating when they turn in their Michigan tax return. That money goes to teaching kids and parents about preventing child abuse before the legal system becomes involved.

The Legislature also should do its part in funding child abuse prevention.

RECENT CHANGES in the law that address child abuse have gone a long way toward bringing understanding of an ugly crime into the courtroom and giving abused children real protection.

But judges must be trained in the fine distinctions of a body of crime that can repeat itself if the victims grow up to be the criminals.

For in the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "The child's sob in the silence curses deeper than the strong man in his wrath."



a political system that effectively guarantees the rights of the individual.

Vaclav Havel, president of Czechoslovakia, in his address to Congress on Feb. 21, 1990, said: "Wasn't it the best minds of your country . . . who wrote your famous Declaration of Independence, your bill of human rights and your Constitution? . . . Those great documents inspire us all; they inspire us despite the fact that they are over 200 years old. They inspire us to be citizens."

from our readers

Police must walk beats

To the editor:
In Steve Barnaby's recent article, "Fear Keeps Suburban Residents Out Of City," he begins, "Fear is a devastating monster." Fear is a basic human instinct as old as prehistoric times. Self-preservation is not such a bad instinct.

Of the 400 people surveyed, Barnaby states, ". . . 63.9 percent were less likely to visit the city of Detroit . . . and 70 percent believed we needed better police protection in Detroit."

If this survey was conducted prior to the widely publicized Freedom Festival assaults, I do not believe the statistics would have been much lower. The city of Detroit does need more beat-walking police officers.

The drug problem, unemployment and crime are devastating monsters. These monsters are not easily, if ever, slain in large urban areas. However, if the city of Detroit wishes to tap into the spendable suburban dollar, then it must make the business and entertainment districts safer.

During the Freedom Festival, there were undoubtedly more police officers on city streets than on any other day. Regardless assaults are going to occur during such a huge gathering of people. In contrast to that, how many beat-walking police officers are on the streets in the entertainment districts tonight?

When the Detroit police make their presence visibly and immediately felt, the citizens and patrons of these districts every day and night, more will come to the city of Detroit.

In other words, get out of the Manogian mansion, get out of council chambers, get out of the squad cars and walk down the sidewalks like everyone else.

Jeffrey J. Thompson,
Farmington Hills

Fox: voice of reason

To the editor:

Thank you, councilwoman Jean Fox for not being "foolish, foolish, foolish" in regards to the proposed feline legislation.

I'd like to point out to the Farmington Hills City Council that the proposed legislation will accomplish nothing toward eliminating the problems that are currently being blamed on the felines.

Raccoons and other "wild" animals that populate this area are primarily responsible for torn-up trash bags and animal "waste" on rooftops.

So in order to appease the few complaints that have been received, the council would have to enforce some controls over these animals as well, regardless of the fact that they are wild.

One might also take note that "owned" cats are fed at home and generally don't prey on birds. They do however chase mice and small rats, which is their place in the food chain.

It should also be noted that all cats bury their "waste." Thus, outside of additional headaches and wasted money, the only outcome of such legislation would be to humiliate the council and residents of this otherwise fine community.

When in the course of operation a governing body finds it necessary to legislate the natural activities of small harmless pets, then it becomes obvious that the body in question needs to seriously re-evaluate its priorities.

Mark Fertig,
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

Names will be withheld only for the best of reasons, and the decision to do so will be made by the editor.

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

Urge for freedom topples repressive governments

THE CELEBRATION of our Constitution's bicentennial occurs in momentous times. With the human urge for freedom breaking out all over the world, repressive governments are toppling as people reach for those basic rights we, in this country, have enjoyed for more than 200 years.

The Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments have made our constitutional system of government a beacon to the rest of the world — especially evidenced at this time in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union — by providing a model for

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