

Opinion

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Good show! Cable spreads their words

ANYONE WHO fails to vote in the Nov. 5 city council elections had better start hunking up a new excuse. The old "I-just-don't-know-these people" line just won't wash anymore.

Not only are the council hopefuls profiled and their stands on the issues reported in this paper, but the office seekers are also in thousands of homes in living color thanks to the proliferation of meet-the-candidate forums, most of them cablecast on the MetroVision system.

These days, dear voters of the Farmington-area, if you haven't seen and heard the candidates it's because you've decided not to.

The civic groups and homeowners' associations which sponsor these candidate forums work hand in glove with the local cable TV folks, who pepper their programming with live and re-broadcast candidate grillings.

Switch to MetroVision's local-access channels just about any day or night during this campaign-time and you're likely to catch a healthy dose of local politics.

WE'VE LEARNED recently that yet another meet-the-candidates night has been planned for the Farmington area. What's that make now, six of them?

The latest — actually a retake of an earlier forum — begins at 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 28, at the Southwest Oakland Cable Commission office, 24021 Research Drive, for those who'd like to go in person. Farmington Council candidates will be featured.

That Oct. 28 date is kind of late in the campaign for some people, but we're sure the candidates won't mind getting a last word in.

And to show you the importance of cable TV in local politics today, it's worth noting that the latest forum is being held because something went wrong and there was no video on the tape of an earlier forum.

Of course, in the Farmington area, this cable

TV/candidate forum alliance comes from the very successful run that the Farmington Hills Council has had on live cable. The "Monday Night Fights" (as the meetings used to be known) are regular viewing fare for a lot of people around here.

AT LEAST ONE Hills candidate, incumbent Larry Lichtman, has wondered aloud how the cablecasting of Hills meetings will affect the voter turnout in the upcoming council election, the first since cablecasting started.

Good question, Mr. L. We're wondering, too. We're betting the percentage goes up.

We appreciate all the hard work that goes into these productions, and we believe that anything that introduces citizens to local politics and politicians is a good thing.

There are those who wonder if the political scene isn't getting a bit overloaded on electronics. Another Hills councilman, who isn't up for re-election this year, told us that elections aren't won on cable TV.

"Elections are won on the streets and in the mailboxes," he quipped.

He may have a point. We hope candidates won't discard door-knocking, hand-shaking, sign-waving and mailbox-stuffing. If they do, we'll all be the losers. However, local politics on cable is a good show. Catch it if you can.

ELECTION QUESTION: Say, who's speaking for (or against) this \$1.8 million bond issue for district courthouse renovation and expansion? Farmington-area voters will decide the question in the Nov. 5 election.

If someone (perhaps the judicial establishment) doesn't speak up soon on the need for the money, we may realize it won't pass. We're talking money, after all, and we know how to voters can be about money.

Make a choice Request drug free dorm rooms

IN 1989, IT was 1,500. In 1990, it was 2,870. In 1991, it is more than 4,050.

That's the combined number of students at Oakland University, the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Eastern Michigan who have chosen to live in alcohol and drug-free dorm rooms.

The steady gain in students making the choice on their housing application to have a roommate who does not use alcohol or drugs is a credit to them and to the communities and school systems from which they come.

Colleges and universities had to be convinced this was their province. Rather than weakening their position on *in loco parentis* (charged with a parent's rights, duties and responsibilities), as they feared, the schools have taken a further step toward increased students rights.

SOME SCHOOLS, such as Oakland University and Eastern Michigan University, have taken the concept and run with it.

OU not only offers alcohol free dorm rooms, but has an entire dorm for students who don't want alcohol, drugs or smoking where they live. Ann Arbor House has had to turn away students ever since it opened in fall 1990. "We silenced the skeptics," OU spokesman Jim Llewellyn said at the time. "When we announced this, a lot of people said it would never fly."

And at Eastern, students are being encouraged to help educate their peers on alcohol and drug

issues. Through a grant, they are developing a national model for student-run substance abuse programs on college campuses, starting in the residence halls.

Recent alcohol-related problems at both Eastern and the University of Michigan are only the tip of an iceberg of illegal drinking that has gone on on college campuses for decades.

For those who for any number of reasons don't want to take part, there have been few alternatives. One aim of Eastern's program is to help students create a social environment that doesn't include drinking but isn't self-conscious about it.

ALTHOUGH ALL of Michigan's public colleges agreed to offer alcohol-free rooming, tabs have been kept only on the four public universities closest to our Oakland and western Wayne County communities, which the majority of our students attend.

It's important that all 14 are living up to the spirit of their voluntary, verbal agreement they made with the group of Birmingham-West Bloomfield parents, students, drug treatment professionals and legislators who first brought it to their attention. It was an agreement Michigan's private colleges have thus far refused to make.

If you don't have the choice of a drug/alcohol free dorm room at an institution of higher learning in Michigan, you are being cheated. Fight for your rights or think about another school.

Colonial lawyer championed protection from searches

PROTECTION of a citizen's home and belongings from unwarranted search and seizure by the government (Fourth Amendment) had no better champion than James Otis, a prominent colonial lawyer who felt government should not be allowed arbitrary or absolute power.

In 1761, Otis asked the Massachusetts Superior Court to discontinue issuing writs of assistance which allowed British customs agents, at their discretion, to search all houses suspected of harboring arms, contraband or seditious documents.

Appealing to the court to base its decision on a "higher law," Otis argued that "the judges of England have declared . . . that acts of Parlia-

ment against natural equity are void." In his opinion, the writs violated natural law by giving police unlimited powers of search and seizure throughout an entire area.

The publicity of the case was such that most colonial courts subsequently refused to issue such writs, and later eight states explicitly incorporated guarantees against general warrants in their constitutions. The Bill of Rights prohibited general warrants because the public mood was so against them.

Otis' briefs were later used by Alexander Hamilton in support of the concept of judicial review.



State's Legislature should be part-time

THINKING ABOUT changing jobs? Consider the details of this one: Pay: \$45,450 a year — nearly double the average Michigan worker's salary.

Hours: Normal work week is Tuesday through Thursday, but you might have to work 12 hours a day. Other days of the week, you are expected to see people, give speeches, answer the phone and kiss babies.

Retirement: After turning 55 and working just eight years, you get a \$1,212 check each month, increasing to \$1,818 after 12 years on the job. Benefits: Fully paid health insurance.

Vacation: A couple of months in the summer, plus another month or so around Christmas and Easter. Your business friends often kick in free trips in exchange for a speech or some advice.

Expenses: During the work week, you have to live away from home, so you get \$5,500 for room and other expenses. Your business friends regularly pick up the tab for lunch and dinner. Your better-heeled business associates usually finance your "expense fund," which makes the lease payments on your car or pays your greens fees.

Entertainment: Bored? Your business friends regularly pay for tickets to see the Pistons or Tigers, and the University of Michigan and Michigan State hold their best football

seats in case you might want to see a game.

WHAT KIND of job has perks like that? A state legislator.

Why? Two reasons: First, there's no question that being a member of the Michigan House or Senate is both tough and important. You are on point most of the time. You have to answer to a lot of bossy and cross people. You have to help make the laws that govern us all and forge political compromises that make life livable.

Second, as I suggested in last week's column, members of the state Legislature (and their staffs and governors and their staffs) are no longer citizen politicians, responsibly taking some time away from otherwise legitimate careers to do a spell of public service. Legislators are members of a separate political class whose main career purpose is to seek and hold elective office.

When members of a separate class are allowed to set their own pay and define their own perks, what do you expect they'll do? Take a vow of poverty?

THE EXCESSES of our rulers (regardless of political party) are beginning to loom enough so that even they are beginning to notice. "We have to stop taking care of ourselves at a time when we're cut-



ting everything else in sight," says Paul Hillebrond, GOP leader in the House. "If we don't do it ourselves, we're going to have artificial limits."

He's right. On reflection, it seems to me that term limitation will have little effect on this problem, other than making sure that nobody stays in office long enough to learn how to do the job.

I prefer to focus on the "full-time" nature of many political jobs. If the Legislature could be made into a part-time body — meeting, say, two months of the year instead of the present nine — we might get somewhere. At least it would be a lot tougher for legislators to pretend they have a full-time job as a member of a separate political class.

By the way, don't expect them to abolish their perks. Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

from our readers

Mayor takes issue with candidate

To the editor:

As mayor of the city of Farmington, I feel that I must respond to the implication contained within candidate John Kenney's election literature.

Kenney states that the City Council waived the bid process in remodeling the city hall, and he implies that the waiver resulted in project overruns. This simply is not the fact in this matter.

The city council chose to use a construction manager method of construction to remodel the city hall because that method promised the most flexibility and cost efficiency in coping with the hidden conditions inherent in renovation work and in maintaining full municipal services during construction.

The construction manager did solicit competitive bids from the major work trades including carpentry, electrical, plumbing, plastering, floor covering, painting, mill work and furniture.

The scope of work was expanded beyond the early estimates of the project to comply with the building code, to correct hidden defects, and to improve the efficiency of work flow.

On the advice of an architect, the city council also elected to replace the roof at this time. These adjustments were publicly approved by council.

A major source of added cost was the discovery that, although the building had been constructed in the mid 1960s, asbestos had been used in the plastered ceiling.

Adjusting to the asbestos problem required the services of an environmental testing engineering firm and asbestos removal specialists, and it adversely affected the work of demolition, carpentry and electrical installation.

I am not a candidate for office in this election and have no personal reason to interject myself into this election other than my interest in providing accurate information to the residents of Farmington.

The city council of Farmington has a long track record of seeking the lowest possible cost in delivering city services.

I hope that this communication to the citizens of Farmington will set the record straight as to what actually occurred when the Council authorized the remodeling of City Hall.

Shirley Richardson,
mayor,
city of Farmington

Special vote could be held

To the editor:

An error was made by your guest columnist, Aldo Vagnozzi, in your Sept. 26 issue. Writing as the mayor of Farmington Hills, Vagnozzi discussed recycling and the controversy over whether payment should be made as a fee or as a tax.

He stated, "Putting the issue on the ballot cannot be legally done before August 1992 at the earliest, after the next budget must be adopted."

This is absolutely untrue. A special election could be held well before the next budget must be adopted. Granted, special elections cost money. I have been told about \$30,000. But the city council has not hesitated to spend money for special elections, most recently a special election for added millage for parks and recreation.

While a regular election is scheduled for August 1992, it is not the earliest time the question can be legally put before the voters.

Kenneth F. Perrin,
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others by making use of the From Our Readers column.

While the Observer expresses its opinions on the editorial page, we always leave space open for our readers to express their ideas.

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

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

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