

points of view

Trouble lurks behind 'family values'

NEWS ITEM: David Duke, a former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and one-time Nazi sympathizer, finished a strong second in the Louisiana bipartisan primary for governor...

At the seventh annual state convention of the American Athletes of Michigan, Jon C. Murray, president of the national activist organization, expressed dismay at Duke's semi-victory.

One of Murray's concerns is that Duke "wants prayer in the public schools. But Murray said he thought the strong showing for Duke indicates to me that people are on this 'traditional family values' kick, and they somehow feel that if we turn backwards maybe that will help the economy and society."

"TRADITIONAL FAMILY values kick"? How can you call a desire to return to (or return to) "traditional family values" a kick? Isn't that as disgusting as the idea of a former Klan wizard becoming governor of Louisiana?



Jack Gladden

Maybe. Or maybe not. These traditional "values" often went hand-in-hand with traditional bigotry. And today "traditional family values" are often being used to disguise out-and-out discrimination.

This trend shows up subtly in attitudes toward women, in the abortion debates and in the creeping and growing use of religious beliefs to influence or intimidate lawmakers. But nowhere is it more evident than in attitudes toward gays.

The Cracker Barrel, that "down-home" restaurant that opened in Belleville recently, has been under siege from gay protesters over the company's hiring policy. The Tennessee-based company reportedly fired more than a dozen workers for being homosexual.

The University of Michigan, which seems determined to provide a racism-free campus, balked at a proposal to allow homosexual couples access to the university's married housing program. A graduate student worried about the effect that such an arrangement might have on "traditional families" living there.

groups protected by the bill. "It's unfair to try and put heightened legal protections on this segment of society that engages in antisocial conduct..." one committee member said.

In Richmond, Va., a cafe owner who challenged a state law banning gay bars got the state Alcohol Beverage Control Board to agree to seek a court order to overturn the statute.

In Salt Lake City, a legislative committee considering a "hate-crime" bill has deadlocked over including homosexuals among those

And in St. Paul, Minn., voters will decide on Nov. 5 on a referendum to repeal an existing law prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, public accommodations, jobs and education.

Despite what Murray would say, maybe we should say a prayer - that a return to "traditional family values" doesn't take us all the way back to the cave man with his wife by the hair and a club in his hand.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Trial lawyers talk, don't listen

TRIAL LAWYERS are good talkers.

Members of the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association, who represent injured plaintiffs, talk to defense lawyers hopefully to settle for big sums. They talk to expert witnesses for opinions favoring their clients. They talk to judges about procedures. And they talk to juries about the pain and suffering their clients endured.

But they're poor listeners.

ONCE AGAIN there's a move in Lansing to curb the number of medical liability cases that go to trial, the multi-million-dollar payouts and the fees attorneys get.

I say "once again" because it happened in 1985, with indifferent results. The cap on P&S payouts didn't apply to many cases, and the 33 percent fees went unchanged.

As I listened to the medical people, I got the impression that a big payout is only one concern, and not necessarily the biggest. The medical people say it's the constant hassle of lawsuits that is doing them in.

Being on the defense end of a lawsuit, even when you win, takes an enormous amount of psychic energy out of a person, whatever the line of work. It affects defendants' self-con-



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fidence, their conversions. My hunch is that it also trims years off their lives.

Some say "the hell with it," go into a less stressful line of work or move, robbing the community of the best use of their talents.

During the medical liability debate, the health care people cited many towns where professionals just packed up and moved to other states.

"NO PROBLEM," replied spokespersons for the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association.

No insurance problem. No shortage of doctors. No problem with jury awards. No problem with high fees. No problem with too many trials. No need for an arbitration system.

The only way to lower the cost of malpractice to the health care system, said Jane Bailey, MTLA executive director, "is to reduce the amount of malpractice that occurs." Thus, in reducing the amount of malpractice, MTLA sees its suits as part

of the solution, not part of the problem.

VICE PRESIDENT Dan Quayle ruffled feathers recently when he told the American Bar Association that the United States, with 5 percent of the world's population, has 70 percent of the world's lawyers. Quayle implied we're sapping our own economic growth by suing each other for the existing economic pie.

Marketing Resource Group, Inc., floated Quayle's numbers past 800 Michigan voters on behalf of the hospital association. Results: 73 percent agreed that "America just doesn't need 70 percent of the world's lawyers."

73 percent agree that "the high cost of lawsuits is making America less competitive in the world economy."

But the only problem MTLA can spot is "soaring profits" for companies that sell medical liability insurance. One senator pointed out, however, that the few companies selling that coverage are owned by health professionals. There is no profit motive.

MTLA's lobbyists didn't answer. Apparently they didn't even hear the question.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events.

Task force fights 'giant' foes

ONE OF MY boyhood heroes was Cyrano de Bergerac, the soldier-poet with a nose nearly as long as his sword. After vanquishing a hundred men in a single foray for love of his lady, he sought even fiercer foes.

"Bring me giants!" he cried. I have none for him, but if he met them, I think he'd join them rather than run them through, as their cause is just and their intentions no less bold than his.

The Southeastern Michigan Council of Government's Task Force on Regional Development.

Chaired by county commissioner Marilyn Gosling and Pittsfield Township Supervisor E.A. Jackson Morris, it recently set forth recommendations essential to southeast Michigan's fiscal and social survival.

They almost identically match those I've been plaintively propounding for, in these five years past. I might caution their authors to brace themselves for threats and hate mail, having resolutely had more than my share of both, because their plan's resistors will soon be mobilizing big-league.

THE MEMBERS OF THE SEMCOG Task Force dared to correctly identify racial discrimination as the premier agent of urban gobble and



John Telford

sprawl, with crime and educational quality following right behind.

To combat this rampant sprawl, they want all area schools to institute equity operations to foster inter-cultural understanding, and they want the too-often-violated anti-discrimination laws fully and fairly enforced. (This latter objective is mutually held with our intrepid Oakland County Center for Open Housing.)

The task force members also want to revamp the regional transportation system - an operation which will enable many Detroit youngsters to travel to suburban jobs.

Further, they seek municipal tax base sharing, the redevelopment of Detroit and our other older urban communities, and a mandatory regional review of any new projects with area-wide impact. This will force developers and communities to install the supportive infrastructure before any more subdivisions and mega-malls can be built.

PREDICTABLY, nervous local

politicos are already rattling against the recommendations, denouncing them as socialistic. Others profess no faith in the concept of regional planning.

Not only is this task force plan the fair thing to do, it's also the farsighted thing to do for the ultimate common good.

Cyrano's not here today to draw his sword for such a cause, but with valiant voices like Gosling's and Jackson's and their bold task force, maybe we don't need him. What we do need is for all of you quiet ones who truly believe in democratic progress to muster courage to draw your own swords and raise your own voices in support of the task force's recommendations.

Your greater Detroit metropolitan area desperately needs you to do this, because as assured that those recommendations will be fought by fearful foes whose selfish interests are their only concern. They couldn't care less about our entire region's mutual social and economic future.

John Telford, a Rochester area resident, most recently was an assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district.

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