

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336

Tom Baer editor/477-5450

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Our beliefs

Speaking out on tough issues

MORE THAN any other year in recent memory, truly big events dominated 1991. The year began with military conflict in the Middle East and ended with a homefront battle to uphold a badly faltering economy, both huge stories carrying major, local impact.

On the eve of the Persian Gulf War, the Observer & Eccentric urged local elected representatives in Congress to speak out forcefully over whether or not America belonged in this war against Iraq and its dictator, Saddam Hussein. We were critical of some, like Rep. William Broomfield, R-Lake Orion, who called for debate but refused to take a hard stand.

Once the fighting began, we debated the FBI's questionable tactic of cracking down on perceived "Arab terrorism" in suburban communities and commended the majority of residents in western Wayne and Oakland Counties for resisting the urge to think in stereotypes. But we also noted the disturbing trend of neighbors criticizing neighbors as unpatriotic — just because they voiced a differing opinion on the merits of U.S. involvement in the Gulf.

AS 1991 PROGRESSED, debate continued on such topics as assisted suicide, abortion rights, racism, urban sprawl and yes, even Tiger stadium — all important to our region.

But the overriding issue of the last 12 months

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for most of us, one that will continue to be played out in 1992, had to be the maelstrom that radiated from the governor's office.

John Engler began the year as an unknown quantity in southeastern Michigan. Even before the last snow melted the newly-elected governor was under heavy fire from critics — including those in Republican stronghold Oakland County — for his efforts to downsize state government.

The arts cuts. Elimination of general assistance welfare. Locking horns with the state Legislature over property taxes and education reform. Dismantling the state Department of Natural Resources. Every week, it seemed, there was some new proposal out of the executive offices in Lansing that made headlines and stirred controversy.

Here's where the Observer & Eccentric stood on those issues and others that made headlines in 1991:

- On carjacking, which for a period last summer made Detroit and its suburbs infamous on the evening news, we noted increased efforts to thwart the pinpoint auto thefts by area law enforcement agencies and urged strict, uniform action by courts and insurance agencies.

- We said the courts should strike down a Michigan Law imposing mandatory life sentences with no parole in some drug cases and the Legislature should replace it with measures that will give judges more latitude in sentencing.



ENVIRONMENT

OUR MAJOR environmental concerns centered around the effects of, what remains for the most part, unchecked urban sprawl in metropolitan Detroit.

- We pointed out that racism was the underlying cause of urban sprawl and said metro-Detroit must commit themselves to renewing communities, rather than discarding them like rubbish. We praised initiatives by Wayne and Oakland counties to come to grips with sprawling development and said the time to act is now, before the problems become unmanageable.

- Changes in the state parks system — in the name of saving a few dollars here and there — could be disastrous, we said. The thought among some that state parks should move towards "privatization" was a red herring. Private enterprise can't and shouldn't run parks which have been developed as a public resource for Michigan's residents and visitors.

- Oakland County voters agreed with us — by the narrowest of margins — and said yes to a \$500 million solid waste management plan, including a controversial incinerator. We noted that in a perfect world we could recycle 100 percent of our trash but that realistically, the incinerator was a viable option.



FREE SPEECH

CELEBRATING THE 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights made 1991 an historic year. But free speech and expression issues were dealt some troubling set-backs as well.

- The Oakland and Wayne county prosecutors stepped up their crackdown on pornography, conducting raids at area adult bookstores and a major supplier of adult videos and magazines in Livonia. We noted that these officials have no mandate from the public on this issue and it is individuals who should make decisions about what they deem obscene.

- We said some school districts were denying senior citizens their right to vote by making it difficult to obtain absentee ballots. Seniors, who have been known to vote against millage increases, should be able to receive absentee ballots via mail, just as they do in municipal elections.

- Michigan State Police briefly considered using a special camera to photograph speeders' license plates and notify them of transgressions by mail. Bad idea, we thought. While we acknowledged the dangers of reckless driving, we said the "spy photos" were an invasion of privacy that, if permitted, could eventually be legally expanded into government monitoring of other traditionally private activities.



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Go Blue

University of Michigan supporters are heading west for the premier bowl game — the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1. And, those staying behind like Matt April, a Farmington High School Junior, are showing their support in

other ways. The Wolverines, featuring Heisman trophy winner Desmond Howard will play the unbeaten Huskies of University of Washington. Good luck to the team and head coach Gary Moeller.

Economic, political sickness results in painful recession

SOME CHRISTMAS seasons are happy, some sad. I'm sorry to say this one will be sad.

The recession is taking what looks to me like an ominous turn.

It's not just last week's bombshell from General Motors. It's the impression that, for the first time since the Great Depression of the 1930s, government policy stands powerless in the face of massive economic trouble.

This feeling is borne out by the recent University of Michigan projections. Consumer confidence is very low. And most folks surveyed said they lacked confidence that government either cared much what was happening or was competent to do anything effective.

These findings are matched at only two other times in recent economic history — at the height of the inflation under President Jimmy Carter and during the Great Depression.

THERE IS AN Old Testament quality to our present trouble. We broke our covenant with our lord of economic common sense when we indulged in the orgy of personal and



Philip Power

business debt creation during the 1980s.

Now that debt is at unprecedented levels, and our vengeful and judgmental lord is bringing misery to the face of the land.

I wouldn't be surprised to see the recession endure, regardless of what President George Bush or Congress say or do, until we have paid down that debt.

This recession is unlike anything since the Depression. It is not a cyclical downturn, caused by temporary oscillations in the business cycle. It is a secular recession, caused by fundamental economic and political sickness in our nation.

THE GENERAL Motors restructuring — bold, imaginative and hopeful for the long-run success of our largest employer — will hurt. Lots.

Plants will close. Jobs will be lost. Previously secure white-collar managers will be out on the street.

And the trouble will flow down the automobile industry food chain — from GM to parts suppliers, from white collar workers to part-time laborers, from computer designers to the UAW and the guy who brings coffee to the back door of the plant.

OUR STATE, already reeling from the combination of a poor economy and a governor determined to cut back and reshape the nature of governmental services, will take it on the chin. Again.

Conventional wisdom in Lansing was that, even after all the cuts, there was another \$100 million or so to go in getting to a balanced budget. Most folks in the know are now talking about at least another \$150 million.

Happy New Year to our schools and universities, our mentally ill and homeless, our arts institutions and the quality of life in our dear Michigan.

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

from our readers

Thanks to all who helped with the drive

To the editor:
From Nov. 13-22, the Farmington Public Schools sponsored its annual canned food drive.

Every school is asked to conduct a drive that benefits the Farmington Goodwill. The food collected is then distributed to needy families from the Farmington-Farmington Hills area. Each school is responsible for planning their own method of collecting food.

Harrison High's Student Council, under the direction of staff adviser Joseph Ludwig, operates a staff-student exchange raffle to stimulate participation in its canned food drive.

For each can or \$1 donation a student receives one raffle ticket. At the end of the drive, names are drawn for the opportunity to be an administrator or teacher for the day. Of course, this can only work when there is a staff willing to participate by devoting their position for the day.

The prizes consist of the three administrators, one counselor and nine teachers positions. This year's exchange date is Tuesday, Dec. 17. The student winners will meet prior to this date with their respective staff person to discuss their responsibilities for the day.

On that day the student will be involved with that staff person, experiencing firsthand the other side of the school day.

IN ADDITION to the staff-student exchange, student council members went to local businesses to elicit

their support of the canned food drive.

Coupons were acquired from Original Romanos' Pizzeria, Mitchell's Pizzeria, Baskin Robbins and Sanders Ice Cream.

These coupons were distributed to the students whose names were drawn as consolation prizes. Furthermore, many staff members offered added incentives to their extra credit or some other condition for their specific class.

The efforts of the staff, community businesses and students resulted in an enormous response. A total of 2,678 cans or other food types were collected during the drive. This improved over last year's total of 2,334 items.

Considering the enrollment at Harrison at approximately 900 students, the numbers indeed demonstrate what can be accomplished through a cooperative effort.

Congratulations to all students who contributed to this worthwhile cause. A hearty thank you to all staff persons who donated their time and effort.

And a healthy pat on the back to the Student Council for their continued sponsorship of such a successful campaign.

Joe Ludwig,
Harrison teacher

The Japanese have an army of high-paid lobbyists with a mandate to manipulate and "water down" any trade legislation that we can present. They like the 400 billion trade deficit of the past decade and seek to maintain it. Also we have spent additional billions to defend Japan through the Cold War, during which the Japanese government, the Central Bank of Japan, and Japanese industry have worked in concert to penetrate our markets while closing theirs.

In my own industry, the steel business, tens of thousands of good jobs have been lost in an industry that is a shambles of mergers, bare survival, and bankruptcy. Good steel jobs don't exist for the young people now. Much of this is due to foreign imports dumped in here by Japan, the EEC, and the Third World.

Save the pep talk, I'm surprised that the Observer's understanding of this complex problem is so superficial and cavalier.

Lowell R. Rowe,
Farmington

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

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.

Problem is more complex

To the editor:
Your editorial, "Bad Habit, Real Enemy is Here at Home" Dec. 5, amounts to a locker room pep talk. Unfortunately the problem is much more pervasive and complex than you address.

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TAX & SPENDING ISSUES

WITH THE STATE facing a \$1 billion deficit, budget cuts were a top priority. But there was little agreement on exactly which programs should go or how much was too much.

- We argued that cutting funding for state arts programs might be popular among some, but it would set a troubling precedent. State funding for the arts helps enrich the lives of all Michigan residents, we said.

- Neither was there merit in dumping able-bodied people off welfare rolls, we said. Moreover, cutting welfare programs in times of greater need was heartless.

- The partisan haggling between Engler and the state Legislature was damning all attempts at educational finance reform. We argued that the solution would only be found once a clear consensus was reached and a radical departure from past programs — ending reliance on property taxes to fund education — was adopted.



HEALTH ISSUES

THE ABORTION debate remained in the headlines but was joined by controversies surrounding health insurance and assisted suicide.

- We applauded a Michigan appeals court ruling reversing a voter-enacted ban on Medicaid funding for abortions as "a breath of fresh air on an odoriferous decision."

- We argued against the concept of legally-assisted suicide in Michigan after unsuccessful charges were brought against Dr. Jack Kevorkian and his "suicide machine." We called on the state Legislature to enact a law banning assisted suicide as soon as possible because the lack of such legislation was tantamount to a law allowing it. We should note that without the law, Kevorkian has aided in two additional suicides.

- We were critical of proposed legislation that would allow physicians and other health-care professionals to keep private the results of disciplinary hearings and/or actions against them.

- We praised the growing phenomenon of drug- and alcohol-free dormitories and urged more universities — public and private — to promote the concept.



CRIME & PUNISHMENT

VIOLENT CRIME is not confined to the inner-city, we learned long ago. This subject is taking on increasing importance as our older communities mature and our newer ones explode with development.

- We praised state lawmakers for their efforts in passing a uniform handgun law, but pushed them to do more in the area of proper training for gun buyers. State-mandated pistol training should be readily available, frequently offered and affordable, we said.

- We also supported the Brady Bill, ultimately passed by Congress. Among other requirements, it institutes a waiting period before allowing the purchase of a pistol.