

POINTS OF VIEW

Parties find common ground for solving problems

These are the times that try men's tempers. Rising infant mortality rates, declining educational opportunities, business leaders' ongoing indifference to environmental destruction, expatriation of decently-paying jobs in the name of "consumer welfare," resurgent racism, decreasing availability of health care for millions across the county. All of these are problems with solutions.

At this historically pivotal moment, our energies should be focused on finding common ground for nurturing the insight, determination and political courage necessary to do something about these vital problems. Instead, we see the same centrifugal forces of myopic short-term self interest and intolerance interfering with the search for solutions.

Rather than serious proposals for

long-term reform, partisan politicos keep offering us quick fixes and facile but unsubstantial solutions to complex problems (Proposals A through D on the November ballot, for example) that serve more to advance special interests than to enhance the common weal.

Amid campaigns conducted with an underlying message of fear and distrust, the unhealthy partisanship of our political process clouds the vision of officials we elected to lead us to better times. Is it any wonder that the public's rising rate of cynicism has literally soared off the charts?

Although we are beyond the crisis point, those whose business it is to gauge the swing of the political pendulum tell us that they're beginning to see a few hopeful signs. For example, the Republican Party's steady flight to the ideological Right has set millions



JOHN TELFORD

of moderate Republicans to marching beside the Democratic banner.

In campaigns for federal and state offices across the country, once-loyal Republicans are joining forces with moderate Democrats to forge bipartisan alliances on a wide array of issues ranging from environmental protection to health care, to education, finance re-

form, women's rights, civil rights and economic restructuring.

One notable case in point in my own residential area (Rochester/Troy) is the endorsement of Democrat Jon Buller by retiring Republican Rep. Gordon Sparks in the race for the 42nd state House district, where Buller is a 30-year resident.

Sparks crossed party lines because he recognized the progressive promise of the regional land-use and school finance reform platform propounded by Buller, a Rochester Hills city councilman. The astute Sparks also sees that consensus-building rather than ideological posturing is the only way to rescue and revitalize Michigan.

Buller's opponent is a self-proclaimed "career politician" who is associated with an organization which wants to dismantle public education

and who — unlike Buller — has no long and cooperative record of volunteer community service. In fact, he moved into the 42nd District just a few weeks before the filing deadline.

The antidote for our state's present sickness will be discovered by all of the courageous men and women who stand up to defend the political center, who ignore the siren song of partisanship and who cherish the unselfish ideal of public service. We owe them all our vote of confidence, because they are the last shining hope for Michigan — and America's — future.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester school district. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth-Canton district.

Privatization has drawbacks in government sector

Technology" and "privatization" are the latest political buzzwords.

Gov. John Engler's administration is studying how to use private contractors for computer services, in particular, in most departments. Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, once a union organizer, is so desperate to hold down union costs that he's talking about privatizing city services.

They should have been with me Wednesday, Aug. 5. The day after the primary election was one of (groan) Those Days.

8 a.m. — I'm at Oakland County's tallying station with a list of candidates for eight Observer & Eccentric and four HomeTown Newspapers. No more need to copy down numbers from tally sheets. The computer can spit out any district I want. Wonderful.

But the computer paper jams in the printer. Time savings: zero.

Armed with the results, I head to our closest office, Birmingham, to distribute them. "Fax 'em," said O&E man-

ing editor Steve Barnaby, who is operating the numbers distribution service in Livonia. I do. Twenty minutes later Barnaby is on the phone — the transmission failed. I must fax 'em a second time.

For four editors in the Birmingham office, I go to the copying machine. It breaks down — jams on every page, and here I am with the results of about 30 national, state and county races. Fortunately, a second copying machine is available in another department.

Are you keeping track? So far, three failures for "technology." I'm an hour behind schedule.

Noon — Arrive in Lansing, where the Secretary of State's elections bureau fully expected to have complete results from 83 counties printed out by now.

"Not ready. Come back at 2 o'clock," they say. Wayne and Kalamazoo counties haven't reported.

2 p.m. — Wayne County is in, and the state issues an 82-county report. OK — our papers don't need Kalamazoo's results.



TIM RICHARD

■ Technology rarely is faster than hand methods, but it's always more expensive, and one crash can gum up an entire state.

three of us from The Gazette joined an assembly line about 8:45 p.m. Tuesday. Local clerks brought in tally books, and the county clerk's people passed them down the line. We'd be done by 1 a.m. and have time for a beer.

Why did it take 15 hours longer in 1992? "Technology" and "privatization."

Doubleday Bros. & Co. printed the ballots and provided the computer program, The Gazette reported. Vote-counting was halted at 1:30 Wednesday morning because of errors in a software program: Democratic precinct delegates had been left off the ballots, stickers were substituted after a quick visit to a printer, and an untested computer software program failed.

It was a catastrophe. You expect government to screw up your mail, but election results should be sacred.

On Aug. 18, the four-member County Board of Canvassers scheduled a meeting with Doubleday officials. Doubleday honchos refused to talk before re-

porters. In a ploy to circumvent the Open Meetings Act, two canvassers met with Doubleday's people behind closed doors. One canvasser was absent, and one stayed outside.

Later the chair of the canvassers reported Doubleday "accepted responsibility" for the snafu. But as The Gazette noted in an editorial: "Let us reemphasize that Doubleday has refused to give its side of the story."

Together we learn: ■ Technology rarely is faster than hand methods, but it's always more expensive, and one crash can gum up an entire state.

■ Private contractors hide from the public when things go wrong. For a government answering to voters and taxpayers, secrecy is illegal and immoral.

Keep that in mind when Gov. Engler and Mayor Young talk about privatizing important government services.

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

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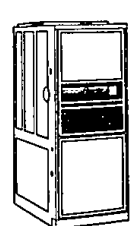
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