

POINTS OF VIEW

Government and business just aren't the same

They oughta run government like a business. Then we wouldn't have such a mess in the capital.

"We need business people in there running government, not a bunch of politicians."

And so it goes — inexpensive advice to voters and administrators about how business is run so well and government so poorly.

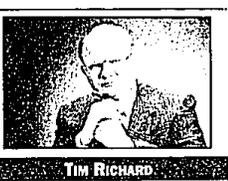
Well, as Bill Clinton gets set to run the federal executive branch, as John Engler ponders improving his show in Lansing, and as Dennis Archer prepares to take over Detroit, they will have plenty of experienced business executives to pick from. Consider:

Ames Department Stores is shutting stores and dropping people right and left, and soon the bigwigs will fall. Ames catered to middle-American small towns like Howell and Chelsea. Its stock was going great guns until a couple of years ago when it absorbed Zayre's and a bunch of debt. It is now going through bankruptcy, and my in-

formation is that it will never emerge.

Cable TV companies have people experienced in raising revenues. Our school districts are always running tax-increase campaigns, and some natural resources devotees want to raise the sales tax a penny for Michigan state parks. Cable people have been jacking up their rates 10 to 15 percent a year for a decade — and getting away with it. They seem to do it in February, after a January campaign to sign up subscribers.

Ameritech companies, such as Michigan Bell and Bell South, could teach Clinton how to get along with Congress. They had lobbyists swarming over Michigan's delegates to both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. I couldn't understand how Ma Bell could afford so many slick, blue-suited guys hanging around mere convention delegates, or how Bell South could set up a hospitality lounge to feed literally hundreds of the press corps. And ask your friendly state legislator how many Bell lobby-



TIM RICHARD

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ists swarmed over him during the 1991 Telecommunications Act debate. Bell seems to need a 3-1 advantage over every other company in fielding lobbyists. Maybe government should be run like that.

Then we have General Motors, eliminating double-digit numbers of plants, attritioning tens of thousands of blue-collar and white-collar workers, including the chairman of the board. Some of them ought to be available to help run government the way they ran GM.

Engler might want to lure Tom Monaghan out of the pizza business to run the state parks: Display gaudy lights to attract humans and spook the deer. Dredge out that bay on Drummond Island. Great prayer breakfasts at the nature centers.

The point is that government and business are different.

Government can raise taxes through the force of law. Business isn't quite so powerful, although the cable and telecommunications companies are headed in that direction.

Government can't abandon entire cities and states, the way GM abandoned Pontiac and Flint and the way Shakespeare abandoned first Kalamazoo and then Arkansas to make fishing tackle in Asia.

Government doesn't do takeovers any more the way Bond Holding took over Heileman Brewing. Government learned its lesson from Hitler's and Stalin's expansions. Companies that borrowed heavily in the '80s to acquire other companies are in worse trouble than many governments.

A federal C-15 worker wouldn't have the audacity to say he should step in and run a major corporation. Why, then, do business people have the arrogance to think they can run government with a lick of training or experience?

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His office number is 313-349-1700.

There are times when this job is just 'too much'

OH, YOU GUYS are just too much! Yes, that's all I could say to Shirley Richardson and company when they honored me with the gift of a typewriter and a box camera — both antiques — last week at a luncheon attended by most of this community's movers and shakers.

It was the best I could do in the face of this nice surprise. You'd think I could come up with something a little more... well, urbane and witty. I mean, here's a man who uses words to make a living on the local newspaper and all he can come up with is: Oh, you guys are just too much!

But they caught me off-guard. And, really, they are too much — meaning too nice — to honor the newspaper's editor, reporters and photographer for simply doing their jobs.

The old-time equipment accompanied a nice plaque that credited The Farmington Observer for its "cooperation and participation" in the 125th anniversary celebration of Farmington's incorporation as a village.

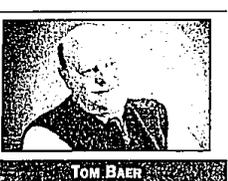
"We couldn't have done it without help from the local paper," said Richardson, a Farmington councilwoman who worked hard to organize the celebration for us.

Villagehood for Farmington came in May 1867, in case anyone asks, and it's been sort of a yearlong whoop-de-do, culminating with the Nov. 23 awards luncheon at the Spicer House in Heritage Park.

Sure, the Observer did provide copious coverage of the 125th anniversary activities, especially the memorable town picnic in Shiawassee Park last August, and we were happy to do it.

Most of the credit for the good coverage goes to reporters Casey Hans and Joanne Maliszewski and photographer Sharon LeMieux, all recently departed from the Farmington Observer. It's too bad that they couldn't be on hand when the kind words and the gifts were doled out.

But the banquet and booty got me



TOM BAER

thinking: A newspaper like ours really does have a special relationship with its readers and its community.

We're close to the community — sometimes uncomfortably close — and certainly a lot closer than any far-away daily paper or some barricaded TV station.

And we're around and available after the coverage. That means any reader who sees us on the street or at a city

council meeting or at an awards luncheon can read us the gospel according to St. Everyman.

Why, anyone at all can come down to our office (21898 Farmington Road) and tell us what's what. Just try that at a bigtown paper or TV station. We think there'll be a man with a gun who'll say you can't.

Sometimes reader contact involves harsh words and maybe an angry letter to the editor's boss. Other times (more often, thankfully) it's reasoned criticism or outright praise.

Anyway, we're here to cover this community called Farmington, and the task isn't always going to lead to antique gifts at awards luncheons. Sometimes the news isn't good. There are times when readers are going to be embarrassed or terribly hurt by what's published in our paper.

But that's all part of what we do at this big bundle of newspaper known as the Farmington Observer. We're a mirror that shows the community —

warts, dimples, lovely smiles and all. Well, that's enough on the good and bad aspects of community newspapering. Just a few more words about those nice gifts.

That big, black Underwood typewriter stands almost nine inches tall. An editor could feel like William Aillon White with that thing on his desk. Actually, the machine did come from Kansas... Garden City, Kan., where the father of John Richardson, a local veterinarian and Shirley's husband, edited a weekly paper.

The history of the camera, a Kodak, isn't as clear. We'd like to load her up with 620 film and take a picture for the Observer. Unfortunately, we can't figure out how to open the thing.

Well, it's important for the readers to know that we'll keep trying... with the camera and the coverage of the community.

Tom Baer is the editor of the Farmington Observer.

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