

Lansing mulls making gang membership a felony

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

A bill to make gang membership a felony is drawing fire from both conservatives and liberals on a House committee, where it raises the specter of "guilt by association."

"This would penalize membership in a gang," said sponsor Iona Varga, D-Detroit. "They take pictures of themselves with automatic weapons and rifles. They document their activities, so it's easy for police to prove they're gang members. Police have pictures of them in uniform."

Varga's bill would penalize those who belong to and recruit for a "criminal organization," defined as one where "members commit crimes as a purpose of that organization."

"What bothers me," said Rep. Michael Nye, R-Litchfield, "is how to avoid labeling other organizations—for example, groups who lay down in front of a bulldozer to stop a nuclear landfill or a dump."

"I'm a Methodist. A Methodist bishop demonstrated against a power plant. I've put money in (the collection plate) every Sunday. That makes me an associate," said Nye, Republican co-chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

Rep. David Gubow, D-Huntington Woods, was worried about defining a gang. "None of these groups files articles of incorporation or holds receptions in the Capitol and gives lapel pins," he said.

Rep. Nelson Saunders, D-D-

etroit, asked, "How do you prove that committing crime is a purpose of the organization?" Saunders raised the specter of "guilt by association" and the name of the late J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Rep. Lynn Rivers, D-Ann Arbor, said a basic premise of law is that one is responsible for his own crimes, "but here you could be prosecuted for simply associating.

What if a mother associates with her son who is a member of a gang?"

After counting speeches, Judiciary chairman Tom Mathio, D-Grand Rapids, announced, "We don't have the votes to put it (the bill) out today (report it to the floor). I urge the sponsor to work with representatives who raised these concerns."

Supporting Varga's bill was the Michigan Interfaith Council on

Alcohol Problems (MICAP). "We're disturbed," said the Rev. Allen B. Rice, executive director. "They (gangs) are drug-related and youth-related." "Gang violence hits every school district in the state," added MICAP's education director, the Rev. Ted Clark. "Members of the Latin Kings from Pontiac went to the north part of the state with a 9 mm pistol to take care of some people his gang leaders

didn't like very well." Clark, who has spoken to student groups across the state, urged lawmakers not to worry about definitions "because the body count is too high."

Under Varga's bill: ■ Being a gang member is a misdemeanor punishable by 90 days in jail and a \$100 fine.

■ Committing a misdemeanor to "further the unlawful goals of the criminal organization" is worth a

year in jail and a \$500 fine — on top of any sentence for the misdemeanor itself.

■ Committing a felony to further gang goals is worth four years in prison and a \$2,500 fine on top of a sentence for the felony.

Refer to House Bill 4433 when writing to your state representative, State Capitol, Lansing 48909. The House Judiciary Committee meets Tuesday mornings in 428 Capitol Building.

Headlee to speak at OCC

OCC's Distinguished Speaker Series begins its 1994 spring lineup with Richard Headlee on Tuesday, March 8. Headlee will speak on "Management Successes" 7 p.m. in the Smith Theater on the college's Orchard Ridge campus. This is a change from the originally scheduled March 29 appearance.

The series will continue 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 30, with an appearance by state Sen. Lura Pollack. Pollack replaces William Broadhead who will not appear on March 16 due to a scheduling conflict.

Headlee is chairman of the board of the Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of America. He has led the firm as president and CEO for 24 years, a period of tremendous growth for the company.

An Iowa native, Headlee has enjoyed success in Michigan politics since arriving in the state in the mid-60s. In 1976, he served as chairman of "Taxpayers United for Tax Limitation." The organization successfully amended the Michigan Constitution with the Headlee Amendment which restricts taxation and government spending.

In 1982, he was the Republican nominee for governor of the state of Michigan. During that year, he also served as chair of Michigan Citizens for Term Limits, an organization which successfully waged a campaign to limit terms of office for elected officials.

Admission to the Distinguished Speaker Series is free and open to the public. The March 8 presentation is scheduled for one hour, followed by a question and answer session. For more information, call professor Harvey Bronstein at 810-471-7744.

The Orchard Ridge campus is located at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, just south of I-696 in Farmington Hills.

Straight Talk seeks audience

Fox 50's "Straight Talk," hosted by Amyr Makupon, invites the public to be part of its studio audience to discuss Proposal A, the plan to increase the Michigan sales tax by 2 cents.

Taping is 5 p.m. Friday for airing 7 a.m. Saturday.

Proposal A is scheduled for a statewide vote March 15. Attendance at the taping is free, but requires reservations. Groups are encouraged. For information and reservations, call Fox 50 WKBD, 26905 West 11 Mile, Southfield, at (313) 858-7069, 24 hours a day.

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