

## POINTS OF VIEW

## Members' actions tarnish MEA's reputation

Once upon a time, the Michigan Education Association was reputed to have the best lobbying organization in the state, and you could see why: thousands of educated, articulate members who could reason with 148 legislators.

No more. MEA not only took a drubbing when the Legislature voted to curb its bargaining powers, but MEA members behaved worse than Ku Klux Klansmen who rallied on the Capitol steps a few days later. Here are stories from people who voted for the bill.

"I've received more threats in a year and a half on this job than in 10 years as a cop, where I arrested people and issued tickets," said Jerry Vorva, R-Plymouth.

Callers alarmed one Vorva aide, the mother of a small child, by asking: "Do you have kids in the district? Where do they go to school?" Said a letter writer: "I am beginning to understand how the Jews felt in Nazi Germany."

"My staff had calls with irate yelling

and screaming. Some would hang up the phone and wouldn't identify themselves," said Rep. Deborah Whyman, R-Canton. "There were borderline threats like 'You better watch yourself. I've never been treated as rudely.'"

Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, has been the biggest Republican legislative recipient of MEA money, but no more, according to his MEA callers. That part didn't bother the placid Geake; it's the price of politics. "Bob Thomas, a local MEA leader who lives in Plymouth, told me the MEA would not invite me to any more screening committees to hear my stands on any issues," Geake added. Other lawmakers told similar stories: Teachers objecting to House Bill 5128 wouldn't even read it when offered copies.

Sen. Mike Bouchard, R-Birmingham, has a marked van that an aide used to distribute materials requested by schools in his district. A teacher told the aide threateningly, "Maybe I



TIM RICHARD

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Sen. Mike Bouchard  
R-Birmingham

just ought to follow you to the parking lot."

At a second school, the aide returned to the van to find someone had deflated a tire.

"Legislators are scum," Bouchard was told at a funeral home — in the presence of the grieving family.

"I've had more abusive and threatening calls over this than anything else," said Bouchard, also a former cop, including one who told him to "Watch your back."

Bouchard wondered aloud, "What kind of role models are they in the classroom?"

During our interview, Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld walked by and asked Bouchard how the baby was doing. During the Senate debate, Binsfeld, a former Oakland County teacher, used the gavel four times to quiet teacher unionists in the galleries. No one — not even abortion demonstrators — ever had behaved so badly in my experience. She issued an unprecedented news release deploring MEA behavior.

Said another senator: "She was gentle. (President pro tem John) Schwarz would have kicked 'em out."

Gov. John Engler, who signed the

bill, has been MEA's chief target. Campaign manager Dan Pero collected photos of Jackson school employees waving "Hitler reincarnated" signs with backward swastikas, "Engler is Stalin" and "Heil Engler" signs.

At one rally, someone tossed an egg. Pero said, and in Plymouth a teacher was accused of smashing the window of a pickup truck driven by an employee of a factory the governor was visiting.

Pero accused MEA of lying when it issued a news release saying Engler had "skipped a scheduled appearance" in Three Rivers because he was upset at school demonstrators. "Outright lies," said Pero. Engler kept a rally date at a coffee shop.

I report these facts sadly. Public education is under vicious attack from ideologues. The MEA can't defend public education when it shoots itself in both feet and both legs.

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

## LETTERS

## She has a request

I am asking if each of you would call or write state Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, a member of the House Mental Health Appropriations Sub-Committee.

Mention that you live in her district and that you urge her continued support for "Special Initiatives for Older Adults" in the Mental Health Budget.

You can mention that the "Special Initiatives for Older Adults" funds Alzheimer's respite and day care programs and caregiver training, and we desperately need those programs. Please thank Rep. Dolan for her past support.

Postcards or letters should be handwritten; phone messages can be left with Rep. Dolan's aide or secretary if you can't reach her.

You can be brief and simple. The main message is, "Please continue Alzheimer's funding at current or increased levels — thank you for your past and continuing support."

Her address: Rep. Jan Dolan, Michigan House of Representatives, P.O.

Box 30014, Lansing 48909-7636. Her telephone number: (517) 373-1793. Dian Wilkins, executive director, Alzheimer's Association

## About those butts

We have ordinances regulating signs on businesses as well as some on private property.

We have ordinances telling us that we must have sidewalks in good repair, although the city of Farmington does not have a sidewalk in the front of its City Hall fronting Liberty Street.

We have ordinances regulating privacy fences at individual homes.

We get bulletins every few years telling us how we must prepare our garbage and/or trash for pickup. We had a new one April 1.

Yet there are no restrictions on the trash and garbage picker-uppers as to how many feet they can throw metal and plastic containers, the result of which are containers that are smashed or badly damaged.

But what we do not have — and should have — in beautiful Farmington is an ordinance regulating cigarette butts.

There were 28 cigarette butts (and some quite fresh, I might add) on and along and immediately adjacent to my cement driveway apron this morning (Sunday, April 10). The driveway directly opposite mine across the street has no cement apron, and I counted only nine cigarette butts there on Sunday same.

Given all of the above, I propose a Butt Bill for Farmington the Beautiful. Smokers who throw cigarettes from car windows in view of a policeman or woman should be fined or ordered to pick up butts around the downtown area each Sunday morning for at least the following seven Sundays.

Youth who love to show off their smoking prowess and/or "maturity" and who are caught could be assigned pickup duty, too.

Indeed, in my proposal, the Butt Bill could mandate that the butt picker-upper, be that person a he, a she, or an it (perhaps some dog-lovers could train

their pets to pick up butts while their master walks said pet), send his or her collection of ciggie butts to the cigarette manufacturer who in turn would be required to reimburse said picker-uppers, and that said reimbursements should not be subject to any income tax.

If there is no cooperation from the ciggie manufacturer, the butts and bills could be sent to the Michigan Department of Treasury for tax credits.

If you think this proposal is complicated and obtuse, then read the Farmington city ordinance on fences, or the Hills' ordinance on tree sizes, types, etc. that can be planted, transplanted or bull-dozed.

If all else fails in your reimbursement requests for ciggie butts, try sending them loosely in envelopes to Sen. Bob Dole or the Department of Human Services or the Department of Firearms, Tobacco, and Narcotics, or Manuel Noriega. On second thought, not to Manuel. Such details would interfere with his TV time.

Lee Peel, Farmington

## Taxes still with us

State Sen. Dick Posthumus: In your April 7 letter to the Farmington Observer you claim that you "wanted to wipe out property taxes as a way of funding schools."

You may think so, but we taxpayers out here know differently. We still pay property taxes to fund schools. Don't they have newspapers in Lansing that you can read?

Or perhaps you didn't read Proposal A on the ballot. I have enclosed a copy of Proposal A so you can read Line 5. Don't you remember? You wrote this proposal, didn't you?

And now more than 200 school districts are hung up to increase property taxes to fund schools. Outrageous.

You letter ends, "I am confident we will continue to serve as a national role model," but you should have continued that statement by saying — by black-mailing the citizens of Michigan into voting for a tax increase.

James Sweeney, Farmington Hills

## Coping with Mom's death hardest around 'her' day

Surprisingly I glanced around the room. Women and men were carefully answering the questions, pausing thoughtfully every now and then to come up with just the right words.

I was stuck on one question. It wasn't a test, but if I could have cheated on this one, I would have.

Actually, it was more of a fill-in-the-blank type of query: "This year when I celebrate mama's memory on Mother's Day, I'm going to

This would be a special Mother's Day, celebrating a graduation with family and friends as we marked the holiday as well. But I hadn't thought about my mother — never did believe in going to the cemetery or looking backward.

Yet here we were, gathered in groups of four and fives at the Southfield Presbyterian Church, participating in an "I Remember Mama" grief support program sponsored by the Hospice of Southeastern Michigan.

It was the third year for this group, said the Rev. Dick Forsyth, who is affiliated with both the church as an associate and the hospice program as a counselor.

Fortunately, Forsyth ended my struggle over the question, by calling our attention to the need to be empathetic toward each other, not sympathetic.

I glanced around the auditorium of the church so familiar to me as we began talking about our experiences. How many times had I been there in happier times for Scout banquets, watching as Boy Scouts, dressed in Indian garb and masks of warpaint, pranced with abandon on stage.

Now we were about to abandon the mask of everyday living that kept us from grieving. For some of us it had been as little as four months; for at least one of us it had been 20 years, since the loss of a mother — most of them due to some form of cancer.

My group talked about how they had reversed roles with their mothers as they had deteriorated and how they had tried to be "best friends." Guilt, anger and fear were present in the circle we formed, with a box of Kleenex sitting on the floor in the middle.

"It was never safe to do anything," said one woman.

"I promised to be there; I wasn't in another room for more than two minutes," said another.



SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

"Eventually you have to forgive yourself," reassured a third.

"You know, they say they choose when they want to die," someone said. "Maybe she just needed a little space or something."

I could have cheered. While some cried freely, others clearly were involved in much more self-destructive behavior. Now suggestions for coping started.

One woman spoke of making a collage of pictures and a video that made it seem like her mom was right there.

And she had the beautiful memory of her mother, outlived in a wide-brimmed hat, beating out teen-age drivers at the light while driving a '69 Camaro.

For me there are memories of picking tomatoes and wearing mother/daughter dresses.

Maybe there are no right words, no right way to remember, no right way to get through the barrage of advertising at this time of year.

Forsyth has suggestions on how to remember mom: put a rose in a special place; talk to her, even an empty chair; light a candle; review pictures; buy a plant; cook a favorite food; give a donation in her honor; give another birthday party; take a trip; prepare a book of poetry or remembrances; take another friend's mother out to lunch.

Gone but not forgotten. There is only one word to express how I'll remember her: Mama!

Sandra Armbruster is Oakland County editor for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. You can reach her at 801-2587.

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