

POINTS OF VIEW

Making a case

Term limits would topple autocratic lawmakers

The lawyers argued about assisted suicide before the Michigan Supreme Court last week. They made a wonderful case in favor of legislative term limits.

The Legislature in November 1992 overwhelmingly voted to ban assisted suicide. That expression of the people's will may go down the tubes if the Supreme Court says the law was unconstitutional.

I was visiting Civil War battlefields during the oral arguments and caught the show on a national cable channel called Court TV. The TV commentators floundered a bit when they discussed how Michigan passed the law designed to put Jack (Dr. Death) Kevorkian out of business. Maybe this explanation will help.

Our heroes in Lansing had three bills before them. One would have permitted and regulated assisted suicide; it had no chance. The second was to set up a study commission on the thorny issue; it turned out to be a farce because the panel split in three directions with no majority favoring anything. The third bill, by Sen. Fred Dillingham, R-Fowlerville, was aimed at

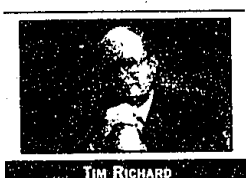
banning assisted suicide. It was passed by the Senate and spiked by a House committee chair.

That committee chair was Rep. Perry Bullard, D-Ann Arbor, at that point a 20-year veteran. Now, Bullard did many good things in his tenure, and I personally like him, but he wasn't known for being fair, or even polite, to ideas he didn't like. And Bullard didn't like banning assisted suicide.

So he just sat on the bill. His Judiciary Committee reported out only the bill on the commission sponsored by Rep. Tom Power, R-Traverse City.

On the House floor, the majority amended Power's commission bill to include the text of the Dillingham ban. The House passed the twin-pronged bill by a lopsided 72 to 29 with nine absent. Clearly Bullard was out of tune not only with the populace, but with his own party, which voted 91-23 in favor.

The bill breezed through the Senate and was signed into law by Gov. John Engler. In the 1992 election, pro-life forces picked up votes and momentum. So early in 1993, the new House gave the bill immediate effect by an even



TIM RICHARD

The House passed Willis Bullard's bill 91-9, demonstrating that Jondahl was totally out of touch with the state and his own party. Again, I suggest that long tenure allows even a Lynn Jondahl, with his reputation for high principle, to become calloused and autocratic.

more lopsided 92-10 vote.

Ah, but the law was two-pronged — banning assisted suicide and setting up a study commission — and the Michigan Constitution explicitly says: "No bill shall embrace more than one object, which shall be expressed in its title. No bill shall be altered or amended in its passage through either house so as to change its original purpose as determined by its total content and not alone by its title." (Art. IV, sec. 24)

There could be the flaw. Two circuit judges already have said the ban on assisted suicide is unconstitutional for precisely that reason. Don't be surprised if the Supreme Court agrees.

In the Legislature's defense, let it be pointed out that one person, Perry Bullard, thwarted the will of the majority and drove it to such desperation measures. Over 10 terms, Bullard became calloused and autocratic. If term limitations had been in effect, the odds are the Dillingham bill would have passed easily and in much less time.

Bullard wasn't the only one. Rep. Lynn Jondahl, D-Okemos, spent too many of his 20 years in the House chairing the Taxation Committee. Sev-

eral times, the Senate passed bills wiping out the inheritance tax. Jondahl neglected them to death in his capacity as committee chair.

Last year, under the two parties' "shared leadership" in the House, a Republican representative, Willis Bullard of Milford, slipped a bill eliminating the inheritance tax through an entirely different committee, where Jondahl couldn't get his strangling grip on it.

The House passed Willis Bullard's bill 91-9, demonstrating that Jondahl was totally out of touch with the state and his own party. Again, I suggest that long tenure allows even a Lynn Jondahl, with his reputation for high principle, to become calloused and autocratic.

Voters adopted term limits in 1992. They take effect in four years for representatives and eight years for senators. Anyone for term limits for judges, too?

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

LETTERS

Sever replies

Dear Mr. Professor Rosman: You have pointed out one of my most embarrassing faults. My grammar is poor, my English is terrible and I have a difficult time spelling all the words in the English language.

There are some words I can't even pronounce. The only reason I compete in the people business is because I haven't run into very many perfect people. It's unfortunate as a kid I didn't learn to command the English language like you. We still agree on one thing — you are the professor.

The last time I was attacked for such poor grammar and spelling I was president of the Farmington Area Jaycees. That person wrote how horrible it was and that most of the people missed the message.

It had such an effect that the Farmington Area Jaycees were recognized that year as the most outstanding local organization in Michigan. We were also

recognized by the U.S. Jaycees as one of the finest in America. I was very grateful to be recognized as one of the top 10 presidents in the Michigan Jaycees. A result of hard work.

I don't want to down play the need for me to improve my personal skills. I sure would like to and I keep reminding my kids how important it is to be better educated than me. I hope their education level meets or exceeds yours.

My strong subject was math. My algebra teacher wondered if I was a "genius." I find this to be amusing because my daughter is in her first year of college with an "A" in calculus. She is having to work very hard in English. Please keep your fingers crossed, she says she will do better than a "C." It would be nice if she could learn to write like you.

If I had your writing skills I would use them more often to encourage people in a positive way. I would remind them life is what you make of it. I would write to kids in Farmington and tell them how important it is to do well

in school, how important it is to get the best possible education.

I have helped make life better for those around me. I believe I have helped build this city into becoming the envy of other municipal officials. I love this city, I enjoy working for the people.

When my grandchildren read about the history of Farmington Hills they may see my name in bold type.

You will be listed as just another one of my critiques unless you work to accomplish something for the good of our city. It is easy for so many people to criticize others. Instead, why not volunteer your services to the good of the community?

You are 5 times more educated than my father was. You could teach me to read and write, but he taught me more about humanity than you will ever know. If he were still alive he would be proud of my service to God's people.

I thought I deserved a "C," that was my English grade "threw" high school.

Terry Sever, Farmington Hills

No convention

Every 16 years, Michigan voters are asked whether they want to call a convention to revise the state constitution. This is one of those years; since there is no compelling reason to reopen the state's most fundamental law, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce urges a no vote on Proposal A on the Nov. 8 statewide ballot.

In general, our 31-year-old constitution serves the state well. As this year's March 15 vote on the statewide property tax/school finance ballot question demonstrated, individual elements of the constitution — even the most important ones — can be changed by the voters without an open-ended effort at overall constitutional revision.

The cost to taxpayers of selecting delegates to a constitutional convention could be more than \$20 million, according to estimates. These costs include holding a special primary and general election next year in each of the

110 state House and 38 state Senate districts. The convention itself could drag on for nearly a year. Then another election would have to be held to ratify or reject the convention's work. All of this expense is simply unwarranted.

There is danger that single-issue zealots of any ideological stripe could seize control of the convention process and rewrite the constitution to their own narrow ends. Our state could be thrown into counterproductive turmoil over abortion, capital punishment, assisted suicide or tax schemes. The risks of a new convention far outweigh the potential benefits.

The last time Michigan voters considered a call for a constitutional convention in 1976, the proposal was defeated by a margin of 2-1. There's no reason today to hold another constitutional convention. Vote no on Proposal A.

Robert LaBrant
state chamber of commerce

TV's influence sparks need to publicly fund campaigns

Last Saturday at the UM-MSU football game, I ran into Bob Carr, the Democrat who's running against Sponsor Abraham for the U.S. Senate. Snippets from our conversation speak volumes about what's really going on in this campaign, now down to the last few weeks before election day.

"Hi, Bob. How are things going?"

"OK, I guess. I finally got up on the air (i.e., ran a TV spot) with me speaking directly into the camera. Abraham has been running a spot trying to make me look like Bill Clinton, and I wanted to remind folks that it's me, warts and all, that's running for the Senate."

"What's the mood out there?"

"Pretty bad. People are sore; they're cynical. I've never seen the mood quite like this."

More than I have ever seen, this campaign is turning into politics by television. Even in private conversation, candidates don't talk much any more about how wrong or inconsistent or treacherous their opponent really is. All they can talk about is "getting up on the air" or "my opponent has another spot ready to go."

There is no doubt that politics in a big state like Michigan has to be done wholesale, which means by costly TV commercials. Production costs are ruinous. Air time is astronomical, particularly in southeastern Michigan where most of the people are.

This means that big races are horribly expensive. By my count, Abraham and Carr together will have spent around \$10 million for the primary and general by the time election day rolls around — most of it for TV.

These factors have transformed politics. Instead of shaking hands and making speeches and answering questions from real voters, most candidates now spend the bulk of their time running around raising money in order to pay

TV gurus and buy air time. What a lousy way to go about picking a U.S. senator or governor!

And it points up how marginal most campaign reform proposals really are. Last week a Republican filibuster in the U.S. Senate killed a bill, introduced by Michigan's Carl Levin, which would have put limits on lobbyists and their freebies. Compared to the favors extracted by the political action committees and special interests from candidates desperate to raise big money for TV, what's a free golf game or a trip to Florida?

The only way really to reform the political process — and the only way to make candidates pay attention to voters and their concerns instead of chasing after PACs and TV gurus — is public funding of campaigns.

Remember? "Money is the mother's milk of politics." It's one of the truisms that so characterizes the political system and contributes so greatly to voter anger and cynicism that Bob Carr is so concerned about.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

PHILIP POWER



Your opinions count... Tell us and your neighbors what you think about the opinions expressed by writing a letter to the editor at: The Observer, 21200 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336. Or, if you have a Touch-Tone® phone, you can leave a voice mail message for our columnist. Their numbers are listed at the end of each column.

Stiffel

Fall Lighting Sale

Whether traditional or contemporary, Stiffel is appropriate in lending a graceful, elegant touch to any home. Affordably available at Brose.

We care about your home!

Prices start at **\$99.95**

Sale Lasts 10 Days Only.

A Stiffel lamp. The heart of well-loved room.

Lighting Fixtures For Every Decor • Wiring Supplies and Light Bulbs

BROSE ELECTRICAL CONSTRUCTION, INC.

57400 W. 7 MILE ROAD
LIVONIA, MI 48152 • (313) 464-2211