

POINTS OF VIEW

# Liberal or conservative?

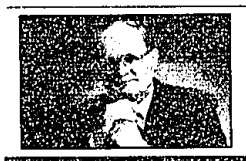
## Politics prompts greater polarization by state reps

Our friendly state representatives in Lansing are becoming more polarized politically. That much is fact. Some of us disagree on why. I've said it's term limits. During the Proposal A voting, I ran a study of how first- and second-term lawmakers voted on replacement taxes versus how veterans of three or more terms voted. The newer group tended to vote no — Democrats for liberal ideological reasons (the sales tax was "regressive"). Republicans for anti-tax reasons (don't replace lost property taxes, just cut 'em). The older hands learned the necessary art of compromise. Bill Ballenger — entrepreneur of the Inside Michigan Politics newsletter, a former county GOP leader, former legislator and former Milliken Administration department head — comes up with a new set of facts based on this year's voting records: "All 56 Republicans were more conservative than all 54 Democrats." No longer is there a middle ground. Ballenger's reasons: "1) The GOP's razor-thin margin of control instilled a sense of discipline in the Republican caucus that it didn't need when it was in the minority, or

deadlocked for control with Dems in 1993-94. "2) This year's session, tilted heavily toward economic and tax policy questions, was largely devoid of some of the incendiary social-cultural roll calls that gave some Republican leaders a chance in years past to cast 'liberal' votes on issues like abortion, assisted suicide, et al."

Case in point: Reps. Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, and Susan Munnell, R-Howell, have been "pro-choice" or liberal votes on anti-abortion bills in the past and had "moderate" scores. This year they're to the right of far right types like Alan Cropsy, R-DeWitt, and Dave Jaye, R-Utica.

IMP based its scoring on 30 roll calls, rating perfect conservative records as zero and perfect liberal records as 100. So how did your local state representatives do? Oakland: David Gubow, R-Huntington Woods, 86.7 percent; Maxine Bermand-Southfield, 82.2; Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, 16.7; Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, 16.7; Shirley



TIM RICHARD

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Johnson, R-Royal Oak, 7.1; John Jami-an, R-Bloomfield Township, 3.6; Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, 3.5; Penny Crissman, zero (Crissman was ill much of the session and missed 24 of 30 key roll calls).

Wayne: Eileen DeHart, D-Westland, and Tom Kelly, D-Wayne, both 77.8 percent; Lyn Bankes, R-Redford, 14.3; Jim Ryan, R-Redford, 10; Deborah Whyman, R-Canton, 7.4; Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, 3.3.

Well, now, what does that mean to you? Did your local hero or heroine vote your philosophy? How liberal or conservative are you? Here are some of the easier-to-understand bills, where a yes vote is conservative and a no vote liberal:

- Immediate effect to HB 4229 reducing the single business tax.
- Final passage to HB 4233 to reduce and eliminate the intangibles tax.
- Final passage of a state anti-racketeering law (HB 4367) allowing prosecutors to espropriate property from

- persons for crimes defined as racketeering.
  - Final passage of SB 322 reforming unemployment compensation in ways friendly to business but opposed by unions.
  - Final passage of SB 386 easing cleanup standards for leaking underground storage tank (LUST) sites.
  - Cut off welfare for fetuses less than five months and use savings to encourage pregnant minors living alone to return home or to adult supervised care (SB 300).
  - Adopt Walberg amendment to HB 4425 eliminating Indian tuition waiver from the fiscal 1996 budget.
  - Concur in Senate amendments to HB 4596 undoing part of the "polluter pay" law.
  - Pass HB 4508 eliminating "joint and several liability" in civil suits for medical malpractice, product and premises liability — sought by health care and industry, abhorred by the trial lawyers.
- 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

**Quality news?**  
I am writing to question the Farmington Observer's coverage of education issues and the public schools of our community. Your front page article on Aug. 28 ("Parents choose new school path") was a tiresome article about four families who have chosen to put their students in private schools. Is this really of general interest (not to mention front-page news) to Observer readers beyond those few families and their friends? As a parent of three children in Farmington Schools and a very active volunteer in the schools, I find an article like this biased and provincial. If these families have problems with their children's education, by all means they should deal with it as they see fit. But it's not front page news. Meanwhile, the extremely important

issues affecting our children's education are either ignored or buried in the back of your paper, as was the article "Public School: State Board redefines meaning..." on Aug. 24. This article, about the very real possibility of our public tax money being used to fund religious schools, should have been on the front page. It was buried in Section F among articles about the Michigan State Fair. The Observer should feel a responsibility to keep our community — parents of school children and all taxpayers — better informed about this and other important education debates in Lansing. Who is making the decisions about what is quality news in the Farmington Observer?  
Almce Ergas, Farmington Hills

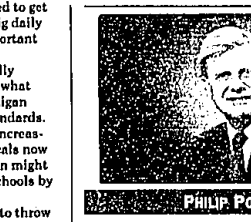
**He 'bristles'**  
It seems Paul Sowerby doesn't like Aldo Vagnozzi's approach to campaign finance, which stresses candor and forthcoming disclosure of the sources of financial support. Sowerby is behind the times and swimming against the trend toward openness and reform in campaign rules. Sowerby says he wouldn't take money from those who want to do business with the city, which is not really the point. Fine, then why insist he take his word for it and refuse to list his financial supporters? Vagnozzi is willing to and always has freely disclosed all of the sources of his campaign contributions. I also bristle at Sowerby's suggestion that he needs big money and business support because Vagnozzi gets so much exposure at council meetings on cable access which, by the way, is another

government reform Vagnozzi helped pioneer. Vagnozzi gets that exposure because he has been giving of his time and energy as one of our hardest-working council members for years. What has Sowerby been doing for our city during that period? Sowerby has endorsements from non-resident politicians. Vagnozzi's support comes from the city's grass roots, because he has been out there working with citizen groups, attending public events and neighborhood meetings, and listening with a sympathetic ear to the complaints and concerns of people across the city. Andrew Nickelhoff, Farmington Hills

**'It's untrue'**  
In your report of police incidents on Thursday, Aug. 31, you discuss an assault that allegedly occurred at Detroit Baptist Manor. The information infers that employees of Detroit Baptist Manor were involved. This is completely untrue. Detroit Baptist Manor has a long history of quality care for the elderly and none of our employees were involved in this incident. You have truly damaged our reputation by your inaccurate reporting of the facts. Judy Enser Lee, executive director, Detroit Baptist Manor

# Business coalesces behind academic core curriculum

As usual, last week's big news failed to get much coverage on TV or in the big daily newspapers. But it was both important and timely. Michigan's business community finally weighed in — and how! — on the eve of what promises to be a noisy fight in the Michigan Legislature over required classroom standards. Business leaders have been growing increasingly concerned at the damage the radicals now controlling the State Board of Education might do in their quest to reform our public schools by destroying them. The State Board, for example, wants to throw out the mandatory school curriculum standards adopted by the Legislature in 1993 and allow each school district to follow them or not, as it pleases. The board also is very hostile to the tough new statewide achievement tests that will supplement the MEAP tests later this year. For years the business community has been grumbling that it's paying most of the taxes to support the schools whereas many kids leaving high school are largely unemployable. Some can't reason well or write clearly. Others cannot add fractions or read blueprints. Worse, the expensive task of remediating those students on the job amounts to throwing good money after bad. Earlier this spring, business leaders realized that the slash-and-burn majority on the State Board, led by Gross Pointe lawyer Clark Durant, was serious about gutting the steps to school reform that were made possible by the passage of the Proposal A package. They started pulling a coalition together linking heavy-weight organizations: the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Manufacturers Association, the Greater Detroit and Grand Rapids Area Chambers of Commerce. They created something called the Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence to lobby for tough curriculum standards and accurate assessment tests to make sure that kids really learned what was in the curriculum, not just in the good schools but in all of them. And last week's news was that the coalition held its first press conference, making it clear that the business community was going to be in



PHILIP POWER

the thick of the fight over school standards. John Thodis, president of the MMA, was blunt: "Since the passage of Proposal A, there has been an ongoing attempt to back away from these accountability measures, and away from the promises made to the people of Michigan. The latest threat to this new system is an effort to remove the mandate from the academic core curriculum and make it a recommended set of standards. "If we believe that these standards are essential to providing a quality education for our students, how can we believe that it is acceptable if some schools choose not to provide the solid educational foundation that the core curriculum establishes? This is too important an issue to leave to chance, and we are not content to say to the students of this state that they may get a good education — if they choose the right school and if their school chooses to adopt the academic core curriculum. "The MMA believes that the only way to ensure that all students receive a solid educational foundation is to require, rather than merely recommend, the standards that all students will be expected to achieve." Right on, John Thodis! Right on, Michigan business leaders! You and your business colleagues, of all people, have a direct stake in making sure the kids who leave school have the skills to become productive workers in an increasingly competitive world economy.

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