

POINTS OF VIEW

OCC's messy meeting may teach its own lesson

Folks around Oakland Community College are still shaking their heads in disbelief after the five-hour meeting of Sept. 12. Stuff got thrown on the floor, some trustees acted as if repeating a line 20 times made them twice as effective communicators than if they said it only 10 times, and worst of all, trustees didn't complete important agenda items. Many watchers thought it was the worst public meeting they ever had seen.

Afterward, I made a joke out of it, asking folks: "Do you want to sign my petition to repeal women's suffrage?" The joke is that six of the seven trustees are women, and the chancellor is a woman. It got a lot of wry smiles.

In historical fact, there have been worse public meetings, and we have been their perpetrators.

At the OCC meeting, George Ashford, a male attorney from Dickinson Wright, 1) advised the board to go into

closed session and 2) twice refused my request to cite a portion of the Open Meetings Act allowing such a closed session. "I don't have to answer, sir," Ashford said smugly.

It turned out Ashford didn't know which section of OMA allowed a closed session but wouldn't admit it. A female attorney from the firm straightened him out. I conveyed to the male attorney my low opinion of his knowledge, manners and sense of fairness to the public.

As badly as the OCC trustees behaved, there have been worse meetings:

- In the 1950s Democrats in Detroit had a convention featuring a contest between two union factions, one of which carried baseball bats. I wasn't there, but it's in the history books. Despite the adverse publicity, Democrats won the November elections.
- In 1968 conservative Republicans in the old 19th District held a "rump"



TIM RICHARD

convention and sent a challenging delegation to the GOP National Convention; that's where I got to meet Phyllis Schlafly. Loser of the battle was a stem-winding lawyer named Richard Kuhn, who went on to dignity and honor as an Oakland circuit judge.

■ In the same era, I witnessed a screaming match in a suburban Wayne County Democratic convention. A young woman reporter was so horrified at the scene that she vowed never to

attend another political conclave, and today she is contentedly doing PR for a medical school. Among the principals (though not screamers) were Ron Mardiro, later Livonia assessor, and Rep. Marvin Stempien, later a Wayne circuit judge of some distinction and a nominee for the state Supreme Court.

■ Then there was the 1988 Republican caucus in a Bloomfield Hills school that went to 6:15 the next morning. That was between the Bush regulars and the Kemp-Robertson insurgents. It was resolved by a federal court decision in favor of the Bush crowd; a federal appeals court reversed, but that didn't come until two years after Bush was inaugurated. Paul Weldon was floor manager of the K-R crowd. Today he is chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg.

Several practical lessons emerge from these tales of frayed parliamentary nerves and fatigue.

First, women have come a long way, baby, and much of it has been downward, but they're not as bad as men can be. Yet.

Second, politicians have a way of kissing and making up, or at least letting bygones be bygones and allowing time to heal old wounds.

Third, hours of wrangling and frayed nerves are the price we pay for democracy, open deliberations and free speech. If it means the participants and the press don't get home until midnight a few days a year, it's a cheap price to pay.

Next day, nearly two million Michigan students returned to classes, 30,000 of them to Oakland Community College, and peacefully continued their learning.

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

He has 'facts'

Fact: Regardless of Farmington Hills' relatively low millage rate of 9.165, the city of Farmington Hills collects more in city property taxes than 30 of the 33 communities mentioned as comparisons in the 1995 budget report.

The continued reference to our millage rate by city manager Bill Costick as one of the lowest in the county is misleading. Only Southfield and Troy collect more in city property taxes in Oakland County than Farmington Hills.

I think it very important that our city government does its level best to inform its citizens of the facts.

I have done some checking at our city hall and those of some neighboring Oakland County communities. There is usually no one available in the treasurer's offices, assessment offices or finance departments who knows what their city's total amount of property taxes.

If the people who work in these city offices don't know, how many of our citizens don't know? How can they be

expected to make informed decisions on city property taxes when they don't know the facts and the city manager is misleading them?

Just so readers will know, Farmington Hills total SEV for 1995-96 is estimated at \$2.5 billion. That is the amount the city really looks at, not your individual SEV, when it comes to spending your tax dollars. Get the facts.

Kenneth Kemp, Farmington Hills

'Grass Roots'

It seems that Andrew Nickelloff, (Letters, Sept. 14) doesn't like anything Paul Sowerby does to gain support in the Farmington Hills mayoral campaign.

Give me a break. Cable access television reflects power. The collapse of the Russian Communist Party was attributed to the loss of control of their television propaganda. This is the most expensive advertising medium in the world.

One would be naive to believe Aldo Vagnozzi doesn't take advantage of his

position to further his own agenda.

The "grass roots" are the senior citizens. They are the persons who have lived here when Farmington Hills was still a township.

These are the people Paul Sowerby helps. He has been giving seniors professional lawyer's advice for years, GRATIS. That is what I consider, giving of one's self. This is time and energy consuming, without compensation.

It is my opinion that people moving into the area later have not had time to develop nostalgia and therefore are not the "grass roots."

Mrs. H. Motruik, Farmington Hills

For the birds

When our state representatives return to Lansing, one of the first orders of business will be SB 529, which proposes to add the mourning dove to the legal game-bird list in Michigan. This legislation has already passed the Michigan Senate, with the backing of the National Rifle Association.

It is beyond our understanding that

anyone would wish to kill these semitame harmless backyard visitors, the very symbol of peace. You are encouraged to contact your state representative and speak up for these defenseless creatures.

All state representatives may be reached c/o State Capitol, Lansing 48909.

Mr. and Mrs. Rex Trotter, Farmington Hills

Free to choose

On Sept. 18, the profession of chiropractic was one century old.

Despite numerous political and institutional attempts to limit Americans' choice of health care, chiropractors have been helping millions improve their health without the side effects of drugs for 100 years.

It is very easy for chiropractic's detractors to bring out isolated incidents for unfortunate results and then insinuate that the whole profession is bad.

But why do these same detractors

not question the thousands of cases of unfortunate results suffered by people who follow the guidelines of the medical/drug profession?

People should not stop going to medical doctors every time they hear that the wrong limb was cut off in an operation or every time an M.D. misjudges a drug's side effects which causes a person to get worse or die.

Likewise, people should not halt their search for a good chiropractor just because a tabloid TV show creates an aura of suspicion using isolated incidents.

Americans deserve to continue to have freedom of choice when it comes to choosing their health care. If we allow sensationalized stories and politics to alter the public's and our leaders' perceptions of a noble profession, we are giving away the rights we have fought for since the days of King George.

John Cromwell, Cromwell Family Chiropractic, Farmington

Powell sends wake-up call but GOP, Dems stay asleep

Last weekend's Republican Leadership Conference at Mackinac Island highlighted the fundamental contradiction of today's politics: Ordinary folks are increasingly disillusioned with a system whose parties are losing legitimacy by pretending to express the interests of most folks while in fact functioning as captives of narrow special interests.

Example No. 1: Abortion.

The shock troops of the triumphant Republican revolution are passionate right-to-lifers who have made opposition to abortion the litmus test for any aspiring GOP wannabe. Yet for years, poll after poll has shown that most Americans believe a woman should have the right to choose an abortion as one way to deal with an unwanted pregnancy.

That's a big problem, and most practical Republicans know it. Indeed, a survey of Michigan Republican Party leaders conducted over the weekend by *The Detroit News* found that 43 percent would like to relax or even eliminate the GOP platform plank opposing abortion in all cases.

But 53 percent wanted to maintain the blanket prohibition. "We are the pro-life party and must stand on our convictions to protect the unborn children in our society," said Don Gustafson, chair of the Mackinac County GOP.

Having encouraged and mobilized the right-to-life community, the Republican Party is today hostage to this minority segment of American opinion — passionate and self-assured to be sure, but still a minority.

Example No. 2: Big government.

During the years when Democrats controlled Congress, the party's primary strategic principle for staying in power was to spend tax dollars to fund the claims of its various constituency groups.

For big labor, rigid OSHA safety inspections of the workplace. For urban minorities, a welfare system that contributed to the culture of entitlements and the destruction of big-city families. For senior citizens, a set of entitlements (Medicare and Social Security) are merely the two biggest that were both ruinously expensive and sacrosanct from expense control. For environmentalists, a preference for trees and spotted owls over jobs.

The result: Enormous and growing budget deficits and a sense that regulating and central-



PHILIP POWER

izing government in Washington had grown out of control.

A majority of Americans, moreover, think OSHA is too rigid, welfare should be reformed, Medicare and Social Security should be cut back and means-tested, and economic growth should have at least equal weight to endangered species.

Democrats, as captive to their own constituency groups as surely as Republicans to theirs, are today disconnected from a majority of voters.

Example No. 3: Gen. Colin Powell.

Gen. Powell's supporters were not allowed to set up shop at the Mackinac Island Leadership Conference. The stated reason is that he is not a candidate for president. The unstated reason is that he is much too dangerous.

Powell's support has boomed ever since he began to speak out about his positions on the issues. He thinks abortion is a bad option, but still it should be a choice for women. Schools need reforming, but reforms shouldn't destroy public education available to inner-city kids. Racial quotas are bad, but society owes minorities and women a little extra help to get ahead.

Government is far too big and much too stifling, yet there is a role for a government that provides a safety net for those in trouble and works for a level of education and skills for all.

None of these moderate positions fits the absolutist demands of the constituency groups which today rule both parties. Which is — surprise! — why Colin Powell is running ahead of both President Bill Clinton and Sen. Bob Dole in the latest poll.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

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