

POINTS OF VIEW

Gun rights

Michigan has too many regulators, not too few

Sen. Joe McCarthy, of 1950s Com-mie-hunting infamy, had said it, liberals would have said he reached new depths of smearing and depravity. The statement was that would-be handgun carriers are "criminals who have avoided conviction, hot-heads, alcohol abusers, drug abusers and people prone to domestic violence."

It came from John O'Hair, Democratic prosecutor of Wayne County. A former judge, O'Hair appeared to have forgotten that a person is innocent until accused, tried and convicted. Moreover, his wording was so all-encompassing that it muddled all persons interested in CW (concealed weapon) permits.

It's one thing when my friend at the Free Press, Hugh McDiarmid, attaches "nut" to "gun," as if they were one word. But a citizen has to be a little nervous when a silver-haired law enforcement officer like O'Hair joins in.

Also in the fray was Ron Deziel, Dearborn police chief, with statistics about what happened to crime rates in Florida after it liberalized its handgun

laws. Deziel wrote of crime and shootings soaring in 1987-91, after the sunshine state's gun law was changed. Very slippery. Deziel hopes you will be tricked into assuming that the newly-issued CW permit handguns were used. He never proves it. In fact, he never even tries to prove it. It's reminiscent of those hokey statistics that showed New York City with a ballooning birth rate nine months after a power failure.

Center of attention is House Bill 4720, sponsored by state Rep. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, to change the rules under which CW handgun permits are issued. There are two issues, and most commentators mix them up.

1. Should Michigan do away with 83 separate gun boards and have a single state office regulate permits? The answer should be a resounding "yes."

2. Should Michigan become a "shall issue" state — that is, should it be required to issue a CW permit to anyone who isn't a felon, awaiting trial or in some way demonstrably loony? Here there may be room for negotiation, as the attorneys say.



TIM RICHARD

But not a lot of room. Consider the language of the Michigan Constitution, Art. I, Sec. 6: "Every person has a right to keep and bear arms for the defense of himself and the state." That is the entire section.

I am most bothered by the current 83 county gun boards. These are three-member panels: the sheriff, the prosecutor and the local state police commander. And what groups are lobbying hardest for retention of the present boards, even to the point of issuing smears and hokey statistics? Prosecutors, local police and the Michigan State Police.

One is reminded of Dixie voter registration laws in the century following the Civil War. They had literacy laws, and the clerk was the sole and absolute judge of whether one passed. If your skin was the wrong hue, you were asked a question only an Atlanta lawyer could comprehend and flunked. No appeal.

One hears stories about sheriffs and police chiefs who vow they will approve CW permits only for cops and ex-cops, and maybe a few politicians.

The law enforcement lobby admits in its literature that "the Prosecuting Attorneys Association, working in conjunction with representatives of the law enforcement community, are developing standardized criteria for use by County Gun Boards." Note the present tense: "are working." Are they confessing that after all these decades, they haven't standardized the criteria?

The purpose of gun rights, as patriots since the days of Thomas Jefferson have pointed out, is to allow citizens to defend themselves against not only hostiles and criminals — but against government itself.

In this context, one recalls Detroit Mayor Coleman Young's remark in the 1973 campaign that his people viewed the police department as "an occupying army." Young changed that, but only in Detroit. Ask yourself how many Rodney Kings would have been beaten and how many Malice Greens would get their brains smashed in if our man in blue weren't a little nervous about being hit themselves?

Have you ever been in a police state? The first rule is that only cops have guns. The citizenry is disarmed.

One of the more potent groups in the Michigan Legislature calls itself the Law Enforcement Caucus, many former cops and prosecutors. Some of its members recently introduced a constitutional amendment allowing the death penalty, but only for cop killers.

Sounds like all men are created equal, but some are more equal than others.

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

Hank's great

I appreciate the good news that often appears in the Farmington Observer. This letter is being written to praise some fine people who are a part of our community.

I grew up in a small town in Ohio and have lived in both small towns and large metropolitan areas throughout my adult life. Moving was always a challenge and fun experience. Thirteen years ago we moved to this area, renting a house first in West Bloomfield, then purchasing the house we now live in here in Farmington Hills, 11 years ago.

Having written that, I want to mention that this area was the most diffi-

cult of all the adjustments. I can't really say that I understand why, but I do know that I missed the friendliness of the corner merchant. Of course there

are plenty of small shops with very friendly personnel, but they are also very high priced and so I don't always shop there.

My husband and I did find a local store where we always find just what we need. It is on 12 Mile Road east of Orchard Lake, Jean's Hardware.

Now, why would a woman write about a hardware store making her feel at home in a community? It's because they have always been so friendly and so willing to help us find just exactly what we needed — even when we

weren't sure what it was that we did need.

The best part of my story is yet to come. It's the reason why I'm writing. It's been almost two weeks ago now. My husband and I were putting the finishing touches on the house in preparation for weekend guests due to arrive at Metro after 11 p.m. We were both exhausted when he discovered that the garage door opener was inoperable. He immediately went to the basement to check the circuit breaker box.

It appeared that the circuit breaker would have to be replaced. It was about 8:50 p.m. and he knew Jean's was about close at 9 p.m. so he had to hurry.

He arrived just before closing and

was assisted by Hank Yeomans, the husband of one of the store's employees. The breaker was found and my husband jokingly stated, "I've never installed one of these, you will come to my funeral if I get electrocuted."

They jested back and forth and then Hank actually offered to come to our house and help us. My husband went to pay for the breaker and discovered that in his haste to get to Jean's before closing, he had left without his wallet. Dilemma number two: This part was not cheap — \$44.95, but they let him

bring it home, and Hank followed. I first learned of what happened when I saw this man enter our home and begin to fix the problem. I did ask if when we

next would inquire about him, would we discover that he was an angel. He laughed at me.

The great thing is that he is a real person, and we learned later that his wife did not mind waiting while he helped us even though it was their wedding anniversary.

We just wanted somehow to say thanks to a fine business in our community — the kind that you just don't see so much anymore and to the kind of neighbor all of us should be more like — Hank Yeomans. Certainly our world would be a better place with more of these kind of people.

Eather Baxendale, Farmington Hills

No hits, but one big error

I was a big baseball fan when I was a kid.

I lived and died with what happened to the Tigers. I knew all the standings, memorized all the statistics and thought that Johnny Groth, a journeyman Tiger outfielder in the '60s, was the most perfect being ever put on this earth.

But now, like most folks I know, every year I get grumpier and grumpier at what's happening in professional sports.

The players' collective greed and arrogance is matched only by that of the owners, who suffer the additional delusion that owning a professional team entitles them to demand and receive public money for new sports stadiums erected primarily to enrich themselves. Moreover, matters of professional sport appear to attract politicians in a way as profound and as pointless as a light attracting a moth.

In the weird world of professional sport, nothing ever seems to add up.

The recent news that Gov. John Engler and Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer have cut the deal to kick in \$90 million in public funds to build a new baseball stadium for the Tigers is a perfect case in point. Some Q and A will show how.

Is a new stadium really needed?

Probably not. The old Tiger Stadium could almost certainly be renovated at far less cost than the current estimate of \$250 million or so for building a new stadium.

So why build a new stadium?

Good question. There seem to be three reasons.

The unstated reason is simple profit. Tiger owner Mike Ilitch will make lots more money with a new stadium than with the old, not to mention the enormous gain in value for his Fox Theatre, Second City comedy club and two restaurants. He isn't going to put \$140 million of his own money into the deal just to be public spirited.

The stated reason from the politicians is economic development. A new stadium, it is asserted, is a great way to bring more folks to downtown Detroit and, hence, will provide lots of new jobs and contribute to the renaissance of the city.

The real reason is that building a new ballpark is the price to be paid to keep Ilitch from moving the Tigers out of the city. It isn't full-blown blackmail, but it's close.

Does the economic development argument make any sense?

Not much. After construction is over, a new stadium itself won't generate many more jobs



PHILIP POWER

than the old one. Some argue that the new stadiums in Baltimore and Cleveland stimulated the rebirth now going on there. It seems far more likely that the rebirth was going on well before any new stadium was built.

The state's ante in this deal is \$55 million from the Strategic Fund. Is gutting the fund in the interest of all the people of Michigan?

No. Started during the Blanchard Administration, the Michigan Strategic Fund was supposed to put long-term investment money into stimulating research, technology transfer and entrepreneurial business startups around Michigan's universities. While the results have been disappointing, it's very difficult to argue that a new stadium for the Tigers is going to build a more solid economic base than investing in high-tech business ventures.

Engler's a smart politician. What's he getting out of this?

It doesn't add up. Certainly, it's not good public policy. The governor first killed the Greentown Indian gambling casino, arguing, "There are no shortcuts . . . no magic." Most economists think neither a new stadium nor legalized gambling are magic routes to prosperity, but there is no doubt that of the two, gambling offers far more jobs.

Voters? Engler's western Michigan base cannot be happy, while solidly Democratic Detroit is not likely to turn around solely on the basis of building a new stadium. The suburbanites I talk to mostly don't care.

After all, it's only our tax dollars, hard at work.

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

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