

## LETTERS

## Let attorneys elect judges

In response to the articles on the selection of our judiciary presented in the October 1995 and January 1996 issues of the Michigan Bar Journal, a compromise alternative should be considered the appointment of appellate judges, and the election of trial court judges by the attorneys of Michigan!

Ever since I have been old enough to vote, I have noticed that most voters do not know anything about the candidates on the nonpartisan ballot. A lot of them, including myself, have voted on the basis of trivial association, such as the candidate has the same name as a relative or is of a preferred gender, etc.

Because of this all too common voting pattern by many laypeople, an appointment process for appellate judges would better insure that qualified candidates would be sitting on our benches, based on merit (and perhaps other intangibles).

But, because of the potential of favoritism, politicalization, etc. of the appointment process, an avenue should be preserved for the election of candidates interested in serving as judges.

The only group of people who are better informed of an incumbent judge's performance or of a fellow colleague are attorneys. Since they appear regularly before presiding judges, and their support is heavily courted by judicial candidates, I believe that the 30,000 attorneys of the State of Michigan are in the best position to make informed voter decisions about who serves on our district or circuit court benches.

The State Bar could establish minimum qualifications for each of the judicial offices, such as minimum number of years practicing law, no past or present grievances/discipline sanctions, etc.

The adoption of this compromise position would significantly reduce the expense and time involved in running for the bench. But most of all, it would yield more informed voters, and relieve the layperson from making uninformed decisions.

Marjorie Nanian Mugerlian  
Farmington Hills

## Provide for future; vote yes

I will be voting YES on Tuesday, March 25, in the support of the Farmington Schools

millage renewal and bond proposal.

The millage renewal asks that we continue to fund operating costs at the current rate; it is not an increase.

The bond funds will be used to repair and upgrade older buildings, create facility equity in school buildings across the district, add greatly needed classrooms and strengthen the use of technology in the core curriculum.

We will all benefit from supporting this investment in our children and our community. Today's students are our future parents, employers, employees, volunteers and leaders; the future of our community. Please join me in helping to provide them the best educational opportunity possible.

Susan Rennels Lightner  
Farmington

## Support phonics

I urge all parents to contact their school boards in support of the phonics method of teaching reading to their children, rather than the look-say method.

Phonics teaches reading by sounding out letters and letter combinations.

The look-say method requires students to recognize a word because they have memorized it. Less emphasis is placed on sounding out words and spelling accuracy.

Phonics is very analytical in nature. It is a tried and true program that teaches our children how to read, write and reason.

California, one of the most progressive states, went to a look-say/phonics combination in their curriculum but recently returned to a phonics-only method. Their student's tests scores placed the state among the bottom three on national reading exams after it introduced look-say.

Phonics is a system that has proven itself, time and time again, to be successful.

We should not risk our children's futures by trying to fix something that isn't broken. On Tuesday, Feb. 25, our Farmington school board will be voting on this curriculum and we, as concerned citizens, must make a concerted effort to contact each school board member to urge them to support the phonics method when they cast their vote.

Andrew Raczkowski  
State Representative, 37th District

## POINTS OF VIEW

## Ross must woo labor's support to be governor



TIM RICHARD

Talk about "culture shock." Two meetings at the Feb. 8-9 Democratic State Convention in Detroit left this reporter reeling.

Saturday the labor caucus met, Frank Garrison presiding. Organized labor is the biggest single bloc of delegates in the Michigan Democratic Party, Garrison often says. Whomever labor endorses invariably wins, at least in conventions and primaries.

The labor caucus lasts one hour. Garrison presents the nominating committee's recommendations. The nominating committee's members and standards never are revealed. The qualifications of the recommended candidates are not revealed.

Garrison calls for a motion to ratify. The motion is made and seconded.

There is no discussion.

There are no other nominations. All in

favor — which means

everyone in the labor

caucus — vote aye. This

year it was a slate of a

half-dozen party offi-

cers. Last year it was

10 education board and

two Supreme Court

candidates. The whole

thing takes just five

minutes, literally.

The rest of the hour

is given to speeches. Delegates ask no questions.

They sit and applaud.

I merely describe. As a journalist, I am their

guest.

At 4 p.m. Doug Ross, a candidate for governor,

hosts a symposium, also for an hour.

Immediately one is struck by the difference in

the arrangements. The seating is horseshoe style.

If you know anything about the conduct of meet-

ings, you know that this style is more suitable to

give-and-take, to audience participation. Ross has

a lectern but mostly doesn't use it.

Ross states his qualifications: consumer lobby-

ist, state senator, work in two of Gov. Jim Blan-

chard's departments, work in President Clinton's

Labor Department.



Ross

He talks about his vision of Michigan's economy in 2006, nearly 10 years down the road. To be precise, it's not his vision but an extrapolation of where the economy and private entrepreneurs are going plus his ideas of how to help it get there, based on input from dozens of associates.

Ross talks about workplaces where "workers don't check their brains at the door." "Teams without supervisors." "Thinking, not lifting."

He turns to classrooms. "Students no longer sit in industrial rows while teachers lecture." "A 'new learning' that is 'active not passive. It involves choices. It involves work and learning combined, and lifelong learning."

Ross allots almost half the time for audience discussion. A retired teacher suggests that retirees from all occupations would be tapped as volunteers to help schools. Ross picks up on it and turns a phrase: "Your older workers aren't your problem; they're your solution."

Ross explains his agenda isn't engraved in concrete. It has evolved in the past few months. He even picks up an idea in this session that he plans to incorporate. The professor has learned something.

One is struck by the similarity between the Democrats' labor caucus and the authoritarian religious right of the Republican Party with its emphasis on reading, writing, rhythmic, rote and religion; the veneration for authority figures; the rigid division of every issue into "right" and "wrong" litmus tests.

One also is struck by the business methods that Ross, the one-time Citizens Lobby corporation basher, has learned and internalized.

To become the gubernatorial nominee, Ross will have to win the labor caucus' support. It will require more than demonizing Engler, the Mackinac Center and Republicans in general. There is a fundamental, cultural difference between Ross and labor.

Just as there is a cultural difference within the Republican Party.

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

## Engler shortchanges education to fill potholes

I got largely overlooked in Gov. John Engler's State of the State speech and subsequent budget, but it's my odds-on favorite for fireworks this year.

It's roads and potholes in one corner, folks, and the state's community colleges and universities in the other.

Boxed in by his traditional preoccupation with burnishing his reputation as a tax cutter but at the same time well aware of the ghastly shape of Michigan roads, Gov. Engler produced some fancy budgetary footwork.

No, he won't go for an increase in the fuel tax, the traditional method of earmarking money for road repairs. (Surprise!) Yes, he proposed spending another \$70 million for roads — \$40 million for local and \$30 million for state trunklines. (Surprise again.)

Where's the money coming from? Engler didn't say in his State of the State speech, but budget director Mark Murray did when he detailed the spending plans for the \$8.5 billion general fund budget. It's coming from the 15 state universities and 28 community colleges, which are scheduled to get only a 2.5 percent increase for operations next year versus the 5.5 percent they got this year.

How did leaders in the Legislature like the idea? Not much. Still sore at Engler for cutting adult education this fiscal year from \$185 million to \$80 million, the Democrats, who now control the House, are vowing to restore the adult ed cuts and make the universities whole.

They (together with a lot of DPW folks who are out trying to fill potholes with cold patch) think the logical way to fix roads is to quit trying to raid the general fund and bite the bullet by increasing the fuel tax.

The Engler Administration's position — shortchanging education in favor of roads — on all this looks very odd, especially if you read carefully the text of the governor's State of the State speech. One of his biggest initiatives was to propose a "statewide framework for career preparation," a term he rightly prefers to "vocational education."

Our state is experiencing an absolute shortage of skilled workers. The University of Michigan is predicting that the Big Three will hire more than 100,000 new workers in Michigan over the next five years. These "gold collar" jobs can pay as much as \$30 to \$40 per hour. Moreover, according to the governor, "they don't require a four-year college degree. What they do require is extensive training, especially in work-



PHILIP POWER

based education."

For years, two state representatives — Glenn Oxender, R-Sturgis, and the now retired Bill Keith, D-Garden City — worked on this topic, holding countless hearings all around the state. They got bills through the House, only to see them die in the Senate, done in by criticism from wealthy suburban parents who saw no point in "vocational education" if their kids were all destined for college.

The governor wants to put together regional career preparation plans and develop a curriculum that links academic and technical skills and includes some time spent learning skills in actual shops and labs. He suggested a \$30 million pot to reward schools that develop such programs.

He's right. Anybody who looks at the Help Wanted section of this newspaper realizes that a local employers are desperate for skilled workers. And people are not going to get the skills to respond to these recruitment ads by studying advanced physics in ivy-covered halls.

I'm on the board of the National Center for Education and the Economy, which has been studying human investment and training issues for years. Our research has found, over and over again, that employers in Germany and Japan, our biggest global competitors, spend far more than American companies do on apprenticeship programs and on-the-job skill upgrading.

It's nice to see the governor agree that the state has a significant responsibility in this area. After all the work Bill Keith and Glenn Oxender did (they worked as a team though Engler mentioned only Oxender), it might just be that career preparation and skills upgrading are bipartisan issues whose time has come.

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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