

## Year in review

### Much remains to do in 1998

**L**ots of activity. Little resolved. That's the snapshot history of Michigan in 1997. The problems we wrestled with in the past 12 months will be with us again in 1998.

The lone exception may be the state High School Proficiency Test. The Legislature, to its bipartisan credit, stuck with the principle that we need to measure what kids really learn in school, not just how many credit hours they accumulated in class.

Lawmakers resisted the local control zealots who wanted no state standards whatsoever. Instead of junking statewide tests in math, communication skills and science, lawmakers fine-tuned the existing system, cutting the length, picking a more rational time in the senior year, changing the marking system and requiring that in-state teachers grade the essay portions. Good job.

On other matters, however, Michigan made unsteady progress.

#### Special education

The state Supreme Court settled the 17-year-old lawsuit of mostly suburban school districts that had been shorted on state aid for special education. The Legislature dutifully found ways to pay off more than \$1 billion to both plaintiffs and other possible claimants.

In 1998, lawmakers should face the rest of the problem: the cancerous growth in special education. One student in every eight is in special ed, and the numbers are growing even as the total school population declines. Costs are growing faster than the ability of taxpayers to keep up.

There's a great suspicion that many parents are insisting on special ed not because their kids need it but because the parents want the kids to have extra attention. Not fair.

#### Tuition

Public colleges and universities are getting the message about putting a lid on tuition increases. But Lansing so far has failed to come up with a funding formula for universities. Oakland University, in particular, has been stifled.

Two-thirds of the House will turn over in 1999 as term limits kick in. The newcomers will lack the historical perspective needed to fund higher education, and the appropriations process could degenerate into turf wars. The job of formulating a formula can best be done by the current crop of experienced lawmakers. Do it.

#### Charter school scandals

A few years ago, Gov. John Engler and some lawmakers, parroting "market" economics, were in a big rush to have universities charter as many public school academies as possible.

Those who were suspicious of the chartering movement turned out to be right. There are patterns of nepotism in administration, funny deals over rents and renovations, a cavalier attitude toward open meetings, shortcomings in the area of hiring certified teachers, and many dismal test scores.

The Legislature and State Board of Education need to think not of taking over existing public school districts but of shutting down a fair proportion of the weaker charter academies. Wise up.

#### Vouchers

At the moment, the forces that would turn public school funding back to the 18th century are dormant. They're not openly pushing their reactionary proposal to pay state tax money to private and parochial schools.

Instead, they are talking about tax credit gimmicks that would be in effect "tax expenditures" for nonpublic schools. The 1998 group of money-seekers is much slicker than the

1970 group that lost the parochial fight. Be wary.

#### Quality of life

Land-use planners' dire predictions are coming true. We see it in rural southern Michigan, where sprawling housing depends on ground water with naturally occurring arsenic rather than city supplies. We see it as commuters waste hours and fuel getting off freeways onto two-lane roads. We see it as farmland that used to produce fresh fruits and vegetables is paved over, and we import less fresh food from greater distances.

The Michigan Supreme Court in 1998 is due to decide a major wetlands case arising in Oakland County. A decision for the development company could spell doom for our wetlands laws. If the state loses, lawmakers must revive the conservation ethic that made Michigan a pioneer in saving Mother Nature. Get ready.

#### Roads

We didn't solve the embarrassing bad roads problem when we began paying four cents more per gallon last August. The Engler administration still wants to take over 9,000 more miles of county and local roads. Unfortunately, the administration has hardly tried to justify its scheme. Wayne County and local officials remain extremely suspicious, as they have a duty to be.

The Michigan Department of Transportation must answer all sorts of questions about traffic control, drains, previous investments in equipment, curb cuts and maintenance levels before it "rationalizes" road control. Speak up.

#### Death

Few people are impressed with the work and conscience of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, who has assisted many dozens of suicides. Part of the state wants a tough law to outlaw anything resembling assisted suicide; juries, however, won't convict; prosecutors are tired of losing, as the 1996 Oakland County primary showed.

Another part of the state wants a more rational, systematic approach to allowing physician-assisted death as a means of pain control. That group is seeking to put a proposal on the 1998 ballot.

Whatever one's personal view, we all can support the approach known as "pain management" — medical education, avenues for doctors to administer relief to the terminally ill without running afoul of liability laws. The watchword should be: "compassionate care."

#### 650 Lifer

The state Senate has produced a bill modifying Michigan's harshest-in-the-nation law mandating life (or, if you will, death) in prison even for first-time drug dealers. Unfortunately, the Senate reform bill follows a bad pattern of giving more and more discretion to police and prosecutors and not enough to judges. The House has a duty: Fix it.

#### Elections

We have too many in general. We have too many one-community special elections on money issues. We have too low voter turnouts. The Legislature needs to confine voting to four uniform dates per year. Meanwhile, citizens need to remember their prime right and duty: to vote.

#### Primary

Some Wayne County politicians are looking to establish an "open" primary that would allow voters to split their tickets, but for county officials only. No one has explained what is so special about county government that crossover voting should be allowed in county primaries. Forget it.

## Blades of winter



Ice time: Many young skaters are spending their spare time at the Farmington Hills Ice Arena, which does brisk business when kids are home for the holidays.

## LETTERS

### Fight anti-Christian bias

**T**he recent shooting rampage by an atheist against Christian children in Paducah, Ky., High School is simply the continuance of hate crimes against Christians that is becoming more prevalent in our country.

Certainly, it is not politically correct to view Christians as a group who deserves legal protection. "You can't legislate morality" is the chant of liberal groups as they push their liberal morals onto us all. What they really mean is that Christian citizens do not have the same rights to engage in the political process as liberals do because the morals that Christians hold are not politically correct.

Unfortunately the mainstream media, including the news and entertainment (Hollywood) media, perpetuate this anti-Christian bigotry by their powerful, persuasive monopoly of all information that reaches the general public. With anti-Christian sentiment viewed as the "in" way to be, and Christian sentiment touted as the enemy of what is "in," it is no wonder that violent acts like this one, and the burning of churches in the South, are increasingly common.

In 1996 alone, 160,000 Christians were killed, imprisoned, and enslaved all around the world. A major offender in this area is China, who imprisons Christians who meet in their homes. And yet China still holds its "most favored nation status." In fact, when China's dictator visited the United States, our own government prevented U.S. citizens from being able to protest China's human rights abuses within the sight of him. He even opened the U.S. stock exchange. How ridiculous.

Oppressed Chinese Christians have fled to the U.S. with evidence of police warrants, and death orders on their lives and yet the U.S. State Department continues to deny them political asylum in our country, refusing to acknowledge the oppression of Chinese Christians as relevant. Our country sends these people back to China, quite often to their deaths.

When South Africa had a policy of oppressing blacks with the system of apartheid, the U.S. boycotted them, bringing down the racist regime, and bringing in a new time in which the black rights activist Nelson Mandela was even able to become South Africa's president.

Aren't the lives of Christians important enough to take a national stand against countries like China? Granting them most-favored

nation status instead, sends a very deadly message about the value of the lives, and rights of Christians around the world, and in our own country.

The atmosphere of anti-Christian bigotry is threatening the civil rights, and most importantly the lives of Christians in our own country.

The horrifying murders of those young Christian girls in Kentucky and the church burnings in the south are destined to be repeated if ignorance is allowed to continue. How many lives will it take before the mainstream media and groups like the ACLU will cease to perpetuate anti-Christian hatred? How long before our government will acknowledge that this bigotry exists and will move to protect the lives of its Christian citizens?

Isn't it time that we as a country acknowledge that the freedom of religion is a right that should be protected, and not continually whittled away by those that mold popular sentiment?

Gena Giannuzzi  
Westland

### U-M policy divisive

**N**o black nor Hispanic may be denied enrollment in Michigan colleges because of his ethnicity, color, or cultural background. Whites may be denied and have been systematically denied enrollment at the University of Michigan because of their color, their cultural background. Asian-Americans have also been denied seats at the University of Michigan because, and only because, they were of the wrong race or ethnicity.

Many of the administrators and instructors at the University of Michigan who champion the divisive and racist policy of negative reaction (affirmative action) do not belong at their present posts. How can any of them really believe it is just and reasonable to refuse enrollment to students who have better credentials than some who are admitted?

If a less qualified applicant to Michigan be denied admission, he is free to apply at another institution. No student is denied a college education today.

Neil Goodbred  
Livonia

## COMMUNITY VOICE

### QUESTION:

What are your goals for 1998?



"I haven't finished my goals for 1997!"

Greg Holland



"To get my oldest into the college of his choice."

Jo Winter



"To spend less time trying to solve the problems of the world myself and more time listening to God."

Paul White



"To start painting again, to get back to my art."

Scott Lursin

We asked this at the Coffee Studio in Plymouth.

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— Philip Power