POINTS OF VIEW

Poll: Voters are worried about young people smoking

three high school kids in Michigan engages in a life-threatening activity each month, yet little has been done to protect them.

No law has been effective in stop-No law has been elective in stop-ping kids from flipping a few dollars on a store counter and walking away with a lifetime addiction to nicotine. No amount of indignation has caused the tobacco companies to stop using seductive advertising to attract more

young people.

Not surprisingly, tobacco use among kids has reached dangerously high levels. In Michigan, nearly 39 percent of high school kids smoke, and more than 11.1 million packs of cigarettes, costing \$20.6 million, are illegally sold every year to kids under

The grim reality is that smoking will kill more than 230,000 Michigan children alive today. And it is as pop-ular as ever among America's youth. Despite all that we know about tobacco and the deadly toll it is taking, without a comprehensive, national tobacco control effort, there is no

reason to believe this will change.
A public-opinion poll of Michigan
votors – released in December by a
coalition that includes the Michigan coalition that includes the Michigan State Medical Society, the American Heart Association, and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free-Kids – found that Michigan voters are deeply concerned about the tobacco issue, especially the epidemic of youth tobacco addiction, and strongly support congressional action on a national tobacco policy that would protect kids.

Almost three-fourths of voters said it is important that Congress address the issue of a national tobacco policy within the next six months. Few public policy issues command this level of support.

support.
After decades of battles against the

GUEST COLUMNIST



DR. PETER DUHAMEL

nity to change the role of tobacco in our lives has been created. It is an opportunity that started with law-suits filed by state attorneys general against the tobacco industry in Arizona, Mississippi and Michigan – and has now become a priority in our nation's capital. It is an opportunity that now rests squarely with Sens. Carl Levin and Spencer Abraham, Reps. John Dingell and David Bonior,

and all those in Congress who want protect kids from tobacco. The stage has been set for Con-gress to act. Numerous tobacco con-trol bills have been introduced, and President Clinton has committed to push for legislatin this year. push for legislation this year.

push for legislation this year.

If members of Congress choose to ignore voters who are demanding prompt action, they may be forced to pay a steep price on Election Day. According to the poll, 44 percent of Michigan voters said they would be more likely to choose a candidate who favors a national tobacco control policy, while only 15 percent said they would be more with the policy.

favors a national tobacco control poli-cy, while only 15 percent said they would be more likely to vote for the candidate who opposes such a policy. Nearly half of all Michigan voters said they would be more likely to cast their vote for a candidate who doesn't take tobacco-industry political contri-butions. Just 14 percent said they would be more likely to vote for candi-dates who do accept these contribu-

tions.

Given the industry's checkered past, it should come as no surprise that the survey revealed that 72 percent of Michigan voters want limitations on tobacco advertising aimed at kids, while 81 percent believe that the action must restrict youth access to nation must restrict youth access to

nation must restrict youth access to tobacco in retail outlets.

Each of these steps on its own may, help protect our children from tobacco—and parents clearly have a role, too—but none will single-handedly cure the problem. To end the securge of youth tobacco addiction, America—wat have in alone absorbed actional. must have in place a broad, national policy that attacks tobacco on every level. Michigan voters agree: 71 per cent believe a national tobacco policy

cent believe a national tobacco poincy is important to help parents discour-age kids from smoking. Dr. Peter Duhamel, M.D., is presi-dent of the Michigan State Medical Society.

Not taking credit helps many achieve a great deal

an Murphy, Oakland County executive in the 1970s and '80s and one of Michigan's finest public servants, used to say: "There's no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets credit."

I thought of him when a starry-

eyed state Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Red-ford, came to me after one of Democ-ratic Gov. Jim Blanchard's State of ratic Gov. Jim Blanchard's State of the State messages. "Did you see this?" she asked, pointing to Blan-chard's text. "He's picking up one of my bills. And this, and this? These are all Republican bills." Until lately, Republican Gov. John Engler has been different. He almost never (hrrrumph!) borrowed Democra-tic ideas. Then can the school took.

tic ideas. Then came the school technology issue. I quote, in order, from documents of the day:

Sept. 25, 1996 - Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, announces a . "If we do something for the schools, plan to put computer technology in all it ought to come out of the education,"

His SB 1188 would carmark at His SB 1188 would earmark at least 75 percent of the Michigan Renaissance Fund (known as the Michigan Strategic Fund under Blan-chard), or \$25 million, for school tech-nology grants – computers, modems, printers, software, teacher training, and so on. Many education groups

including unions, endorse it.

Peters argues that Michigan ranks in the bottom 20 percent in the nation in school technology – specifically, 44th in classroom computers, 41st in modems, 41st in printers. (Peters'

press release.) Sept. 30, 1996 – Jim Tobin, communications director of the Michigan Jobs Commission, said economic development is the right approach for the Renaissance Fund.

Tobin said. (Amy Lane, Crain's Detroit

Oct. 7, 1996 - Engler's appointees to the Renaissance Fund board allocate the money to local governments for land assembly, land reclamation and infrastructure for economic devel-

Engler says he dislikes Peters' bill because it amounts to "another line

item in the budget ... We had over 100 categorical programs in our school aid bill (prior to Proposal A) ... We've gotten rid of that." Engler says school districts should

pay for their own technology from their \$11 billion in state aid. He sees a Peters-union plot to free up more general fund money for higher teachers' salaries. (My story, this newspa-

per.)
Feb. 4, 1998 – Gov. Engler will
electrically send lawmakers a \$30
million plan to make sure Michigan
students and workers have access to
the Internet and other computer technology. Money for the three-year plan
will be tapped from the Renaissance
Fund, an account set aside for ecopomic development. nomic development.
Engler's plan includes 100 grants

of \$10,000 each this year and next year to schools, libraries and other community centers to expand the

availability of computers to students and others. (Mark Hornbeck, Detroit

News.)
Feb. 4, 1998 - "My goal is to make these resources available statewide. Technology can bring the best and brightest educators - our 'master teachers' - and learning programs to all our state's children...

"Our goals include ensuring that EVERY Michigan child has an equal educational opportunity ... "While MY (emphasis added) edu-

cation technology plan ..." (Text of Engler's message on education and technology.) Footnote: Peters claimed credit

only for announcing the plan - not for

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

Prison spending out of line

he devil, as they say, is in the details. And reading the fine print in the state budget proposed last week by Gov. John Engler

proposed make veer by door some Engler proves the adage.

Coming into an election year, the governor wants state general fund, the main source of discretionary spending, to grow just 1.5 percent, less than inflation and, therefore, by any mea-

sure politically correct.

Despite all the soaring language in the State of the State speech, much of what Engler wants to do in the coming fiscal year will be paid for by those nasty people at the federal government in Washington, D.C.

Remember the \$200 million in extra highway

repairs? Comes from additional federal highway aid, as well as an increase in the state gasoline tax. What about the nice idea of subsi-dizing health insurance for 156,000 uninsured children? Paid for by a \$64 million federal

grant.
And where does the \$500 million for the much touted program in toxic waste cleanup and improvement in state parks come from? Borrowing, that's where. The governor wants to issue bonds, which is mother way of saying he wants to borrow the money and let his succes-

sors figure out how to pay for it.

The only notable homegrown increase in the \$8.77 million general fund budget proposed by Englor is for – remember, it's an election year – prisons. The governor wants to spend \$180 million to build space to house another 5,400 inmates. More prisons means more spending or inmates. More prisons means more specially op-prisoners, and the governor wants to channel another \$56 million to the \$1.4 billion we already spend on the Michigan Department of Corrections, a 4.2 percent increase. I suppose no one should be surprised at the priority given to making more slam space. After all, prison inmates don't vote, and the political prison inmates don't vote, and the political

pros say there's no downside to a sitting gover-nor's wanting to spend more on warehousing

criminals.

What's curious about Engler's proposal, how What's curious about Engler's proposal, now-ever, is that he doesn't say a thing about the fact that costs per inmate in Michigan prisons are considerably above neighboring states such as Ohio. Before we go plunging into another orgy of prison construction, wouldn't it make sense to take a serious look at just why Michi-gan's costs per inmate are so much higher than other states? The idea of a Blue Ribbon Commission on prison costs, so far, has been received with a cold shoulder from the gover-

So who gets the shaft in the governor's

spending plan?
Colleges and universities, mostly.
Engler wants to increase higher education



... the governor can always blame college trustees for raising tuition.

appropriations by just 1.5 percent in the coming year, well below the rate of inflation. There is no doubt that if his recommendation holds, uni-

ine doubt that if his recommendation holds, universities will have no choice other than to bump up tuition yet again. But, heek, most college kids don't vote, and the governor can always blame college trustees for raising tuition.

There is no doubt that higher education benefited during the past two fiscal years from appropriations in excess of the inflation rate. But a quick look at the history of state spending on colleges and universities – well below the rate of inflation for the past 20 years – suggests that just two years of catchup are not enough. State Sen, John Schwarz, chair of the Senate Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee

Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee and the Legislature's main authority on spend-ing for colleges and universities, will hold hearings on the state of state funding for higher edu-cation in Ann Arbor at 10 a.m. Friday. Another will be held at 10 a.m. March 2 in Oakland Uni-versity's Meadowbrook Hall.

"There's no need to sound alarmist right now," said Schwarz, pointing out that the Legis-lature traditionally works to find extra money in the state budget to keep tuition at state col-

But that will be especially tough this year. Because of a Supreme Court decision, the state will pay \$1.1 billion to school districts to settle a

will pay \$1.1 billion to school districts to settle a suit over funding for special education. And Engler wants to do a tax cut in an election year, not to mention the extra spending on prisons. That's budgetary politics in an election year. What you get the increased bill for your kid's tuition at college, don't call me. Call the Governor's Office at (517) 373-3400.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at prover@conline.com

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