

Politics dilute research money

As a news item it got buried, but it offered a revealing insight into the workings of the political process. And it provided telling evidence of why public expenditures allocated by the legislature so often waste taxpayer money.

As part of the overall \$1.5 billion-plus appropriation for state universities that received legislative approval last week, spending \$50 million on basic research into the life sciences is peanuts. But Sens. John Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, and Harry Gast, R-St. Joseph, wanted to promote a "life sciences corridor" where medical research could both save lives and provide high tech jobs for Michigan.

The original idea was to target three of the state's 15 public universities — U-M, MSU and Wayne State — together with the new Van Andel Research Institute in Grand Rapids with money for research support.

The idea made good sense: Focus the spending on the place where it's most likely to get a good return. That meant concentrating funds on the universities with an established track record in research. The U-M is the top public research university in the country, with a research budget of \$360 million in 1997. At \$146 million, MSU ranks second in the state, while Wayne at \$87 million ranks third.

Enter, however, legislative politics, which in practice means delivering pork for the locals before bothering with concentrated investments. Many legislators think it's their job to represent the university in their district, while others want to grab support for their alma mater. For example, House Speaker Chuck Perricone, who represents Kalamazoo (where Western Michigan University is located) objected to the tight focus of the proposed research corridor. "The corridor is too narrow," said Perricone.

So the original idea was watered down. The appropriation is still for \$50 million. But instead of tightly focused support for life science research at three state research universities, a 14-member commission will be appointed to decide which research projects deserve state funding and report annually to the legislature on its work. Supposedly, individual legislators will have no direct say in which projects are funded.

If you believe that, I've got a nice bridge I'm willing to sell you. It was ever thus.



PHIL POWER

Back in the early 1980s, I was appointed a member of Gov. Blanchard's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, chaired by legendary former MSU president John Hannah. This was when times were tough and funding for Michigan public universities had suffered.

I suggested something called the Research Excellence Fund, a pot of money designed to be doled out to state universities in proportion to their demonstrated ability to carry out funded research. As a practical matter, this would have focused the lion's share of extra money on state's four main research universities: U-M, MSU, Wayne State and Michigan Tech.

The commission agreed with the idea and made it a part of the final report. Blanchard endorsed the proposal and sent it to the legislature.

Guess what? Legislative politics took over. First, lawmakers argued that it would look "bad" if only a few universities got the bulk of the extra funding. Next, individual reps and senators started pitching for their own schools. The final outcome was a Research Excellence Fund that was watered down beyond all recognition. U-M, MSU, WSU and MTU got some extra money, but a lot of it went to a lot of other universities that had no particular history of carrying out research!

In other words, a lot of the money got wasted. Most effective business executives say a key part of good management is always to focus scarce resources where they can do the most good and not to scatter them hither and thither. But that's business thinking, which takes place in an environment where resources are scarce and bottom line results are all-important.

That's hardly the way the political system does business. And that's why so many folks are so deeply suspicious of the political process as a way of allocating scarce public resources.

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 ppower@goonline.com

Bike helmet law clashes head on with freedom to raise our children

During the last six weeks since the Farmington Hills City Council revived the dead and buried mandatory helmet law for everyone under 16 everywhere while riding their bikes, skateboards and in-line skates, there has been a lot of discussion concerning what is best. We think that is great.

Some have referred to parents who dared to handle their own families, irresponsible parents. Some have referred to the city council as the typical left wing elite who want to govern every aspect of life. Some (mostly the kids who will be regulated) have called the council cowardly for being afraid to mandate helmets for themselves.

During this time, responsible parents have continued to do a great job raising their children to think and act responsibly. As just another day in Thornton Wilder's play, "Our Town," we teach, listen, learn and act for our kids' best, all in a day's work. As such, responsible parents deserve the right to continue to manage their families without interference. Yet the council plods on with more meaningless regulation. Simply ask yourself why they won't just put this proposal on a citywide ballot for a vote. They will not tell us.

What it's all about

What this debate is all about is freedom. Admittedly, this is a small issue in a small town. However, it is just another piece of the puzzle in this experiment called American freedom.

Last month our mayor referred to these ideas of freedom as old and tired. While I agree that they have been around for a long time, they are very much alive, well and burning in the hearts of those who wish they have what we have.

The latest idea from city council is to charge our kids with a civil infraction for not wearing a helmet. You, as their parent, will

GUEST COLUMNIST



ROBERT IGRISAN

be required to appear before an Oakland County probate judge and explain why your son or daughter does not obey the council. Police officers will be taken from their important tasks of catching real criminals to track down your kids, that are otherwise law-abiding.

Thousands upon thousands from around the world come to America, not for her multiculturalism, but for her melting pot of freedom that reaches out with open arms to all who will participate. The last 5,000 years of recorded history have taught us that true freedom is rare and precious.

We must be careful what liberty we give away, as we do not know which liberty will be taken away next. With every protection, there is a similar loss of freedom.

Responsible parents have handled today's issue and most other issues very well. They should not be forced to defend civil infraction charges for their kids in court for this issue.

A different story

Many claims and vague references have been made in recent weeks to the facts. We felt you should hear all of them.

The incentives now in place in our city have worked to encourage kids to wear helmets.

Neither city council nor the police department have studied the accident statistics of Farmington Hills to determine if anything from this community

requires this law.

More than 58 percent of deaths on bikes in America in 1997 and 1998 were caused by cars and trucks. Most of these riders were wearing helmets.

Any impact with a car or truck at nearly any speed more than 5 mph (much less 70 mph) will kill the biker, skateboarder or in-line skater, with or without helmets.

42,000 people die each year while riding in cars and trucks.

Bike riding deaths are one of the lowest causes of accidental deaths in children.

More children die every year in bathtubs.

More than 1,000 pedestrian children die each year just walking down the street.

More than 1,000 children die in swimming pools each year.

Still, the real issue remains freedom. For every perceived threat, someone somewhere will want to take away your freedom.

Government is not our parent and cannot protect us from every evil. We already have meaningless head rests in cars that do not stop whiplash. The third brake light on cars was going to stop all rear-end collisions. Air bags would not kill.

We even regulate what covers the ground under our swingsets and the dimensions of bunk beds.

Unfortunately, more feel-good legislation will not make us feel good about ourselves or save one life. Our kids can get abortions but they cannot ride without helmets. We feed them all manner of bad material on the Internet, but they cannot skate without helmets. This does not make sense.

Responsible parents in Farmington Hills are doing a good job with their children on bike safety. Now Responsible Parents needs your help to let the council know how you feel and to help fill our petitions. Call the Freedom Hotline at (248) 442-2500 ext. 201.

Robert Igrisan is a Farmington Hills resident and attorney.

Get Ready. Get Set...Register Now!
for Preschool & Kindergarten Enrichment

at the JCC

Infant/Toddler (wait list available)
Registration is now in progress for fall '99.

What makes our program so special?

For Our Children:

- Superior Staff/Child Ratios
- Sports Specialist
- Swimming Lessons
- Kindermusik Specialist
- Library & Computers
- Judaic Specialist
- Children's Museum
- Safe, Supervised Environment

For Our Parents:

- Parent Education Seminars
- Jewish Holiday Family Programs
- Summer Camp '99
- School Break Programming
- Before and After-Care (7 a.m.-6 p.m.)

For more information, a personal tour or to register, please call the Child Development Department at (248) 661-7605.

Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit
D. Dan & Betty Kahn Building
6600 West Maple Road • West Bloomfield, MI • (248) 661-1000

THIS IS IT FINAL 7 DAYS!

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS STORE CLOSING FOREVER!

FINAL DAYS ARE
NOW JUST HOURS!
...MINUTES
...SECONDS
AWAY!

YOU ARE
THE BOSS!
NAME YOUR
OWN PRICE!
ALL REASONABLE
OFFERS ACCEPTED!

bedland FURNITURE

29111 Telegraph Rd.
Southfield, MI
Northwest corner of I-24
248-356-2222

OPEN DAILY 10 TO 5 • SAT 10 TO 5 • SUNDAY 12 TO 5 • Financing available. Use Cash.