

POINTS OF VIEW

Campaign finance reform isn't likely from politicians

As the year winds down, newspapers are in the habit of running stories purporting to list the biggest news stories of the year.

My candidate for inclusion comes from a squib written in November by David Ashenfelter of the Detroit Free Press:

"Pundits thought Michigan Supreme Court Justice Clifford Taylor would be the first high-court candidate to break the million-dollar campaign fund-raising barrier.

"But campaign finance reports filed last week show Maura Corrigan broke the barrier first, raising \$1,004,495 in a successful effort to win one of three \$124,770-a-year seats on the court. Corrigan, chief judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals, spent all but \$8,052 of her money, mostly for ads.

"Corrigan, a Republican nominee, raised more than a third of the money in the campaign's final month from the Michigan and Detroit Regional chambers of commerce, Michigan

Bankers Association, Michigan Association of Home Builders, Michigan Restaurant Association, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Michigan, Michigan Doctors and Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan.

"Taylor raised \$943,863." Of course, it's hardly surprising that the tidal wave of special interest money, previously focused largely on the Michigan Legislature, has now engulfed our state's highest court. It's logical for the bigwigs who run the political action committees. After all, if buying influence with legislators works, why not judges?

The probable result, of course, is that public attitudes regarding the impartiality of decisions from the Supreme Court will quickly become just about as alienated and cynical as public opinion now holds votes in the state legislature.

Certainly, the longest-running scandal in our public life is the infestation of special interest money in



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election campaigns. Poll after poll shows conclusively that ordinary folks figure that candidate after candidate is bought and paid for by wealthy special interest groups.

The results are predictable. Voter turnout, already low by historical standards, continues to drop. Respect for the integrity of our political institutions declines. Interest in "direct action" outside of the political system increases.

What to do about it? Good ques-

tion. Do-gooder organizations have tried for years to get lawmakers, whether in the U.S. Congress or the Michigan Legislature, to enact campaign finance reform. Ha! Only the most naive among us would believe that politicians elected by special interest money actually would vote to end the system that elected them.

Others of a more legalistic turn of mind have tried to find ways to prove that campaign contributions represent very thinly disguised bribery.

Odd, isn't it, that the same lawmakers who gladly accept campaign contributions also enact the laws that make it tough to get a bribery conviction? If you look carefully, you will find that the laws on bribery in Michigan are very narrowly defined, requiring a specific, provable *quid pro quo*, a direct link between a vote and a contribution.

There may be another device: conflict of interest. The Michigan conflict

of interest statutes forbid public officials from making money by virtue of holding office. Is it, therefore, a conflict of interest for a judge who in October accepts a big campaign contribution from the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, to rule next March on cases involving the Michigan Chamber of Commerce?

I wonder.

And dare I to wonder, at this Christmas season, whether champion fund-raiser Supreme Court Justice Corrigan and Taylor will see fit to recuse themselves from sitting in judgment when cases involving their list of big contributors come to the court?

Don't hold your breath.

Phil Power is chairman of Home-Town 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@econline.com

Leave a legacy: Give of your knowledge, wisdom, talents

"This is what I know about you. You have greatness within you!" — Excerpt from a speech by Les Brown

The worst thing that can happen to you when you give your time, money, experiences, education, love, home or heart to another person is that you will become a better person.

Can you imagine that? By helping others, we also help ourselves, our families, our places of worship and our communities in which we live.

What is it about us that makes us feel that way? Is it something in the human gene pool? It may be, but animals feel the same way about their young that we do about ours.

It seems to me that most of the people since Adam and Eve wanted to help their neighbor. There have been a number of instances in human history when some people were just wanted to think and act like the sun revolved about them. On the whole

though, I think most people are born with a certain degree of a giving nature.

As much as I want to believe in the theory that all people are created equal, there are times when I question that wisdom. So much of a person's life is dependent on his/her exposure to the world. I heard a wise person say that you become most like the five people you associate with most. If a person is exposed to people of character, honor, civility and humility, then chances are they will also have those traits. If a person is only exposed to crime, drugs, prostitution and betrayal, God only knows where they will end up.

The growth of a person is no different from a crop a farmer grows. The rules of nature are there for a reason. You must plant the seeds, good seeds, at the beginning of life.

Feed children's minds with acts of kindness, charity and a thirst for knowledge. During the growing years,

GUEST COLUMNIST



GEORGE SARKISIAN

cultivate those minds. Water them, fertilize them, give them plenty of sunshine, and till the soil. When those children have reached maturity, their minds are ready to be harvested. The fruits and vegetable are ripe for the picking, ready to spread all the efforts of a successful growing season back in

the land from which they came.

Every man, woman, and child on earth has greatness within them.

You have knowledge, wisdom, experiences, talents and possibilities that are priceless. The greatest legacy you can leave behind is to pass on all that knowledge, wisdom and talent to future generations so they can benefit from the experiences that you went through. At that time, it is up to the children to make the world a better place for their generation and the generations that follow them.

It doesn't matter how old or young you are, there is always someone in this world who can benefit from the experiences of your life. Share those experiences with them.

Remember these things the next time you are in a selfish mood.

Actually, when you think about it, there is really no difference between knowledge and money.

Money is only a tool this civilization has determined all of us use to

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obtain the earthly things we need to survive. The more God trusts us with, the more accountable we are for how we use it.

The same can be said for knowledge. The more your life's experiences have enriched your life, the richer this world will become as you give back those riches.

All the best.
George Sarkisian is a Farmington Hills resident.

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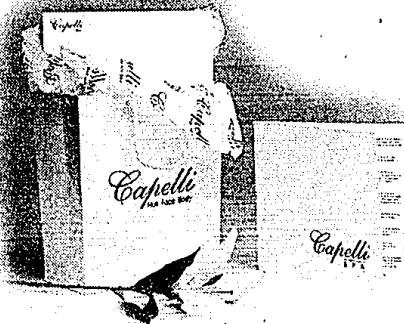
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