

## POINTS OF VIEW

## Indeed, Ford has a better idea

We are plod in the middle of the greatest surge of technological change since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. Information technology and its various applications such as the Internet will produce an enormous range of innovations that will bring fundamental changes to our entire society.

We saw a great example in Michigan last week.

It was the decision by Ford Motor Co. to provide home computers, software and Internet access to all 350,000 employees for a cost of \$5 per month.

What a sensible and far-reaching step! At one stroke, Ford not only brought its entire work force up to date with tomorrow but also gave each worker an incentive to engage in the technology that will change profoundly everything in our society, including automobiles.

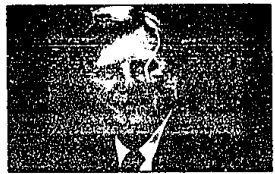
To achieve by traditional means such engagement and potential productivity gain would have taken years of complicated head-butting negotiations with the UAW. Now Ford is ahead of the pack, with DaimlerChrysler and General Motors scrambling to catch up. Many other employers are sure to follow. Already, Delta Airlines has announced a similar plan.

Moreover, the sheer numbers of people who will enter into IT through employer-subsidized plans will propagate the technology throughout all reaches of society in a way never believed possible. And for a big state like Michigan, where class divisions have often stalled profound social change, the impact will be unimaginably great.

A couple of years ago, I served on the Information Technology Commission, a think group put together by the Kellogg Foundation. A group of Michigan leaders from business, labor, education and government all struggled to make sense of the coming IT revolution and worked to figure out how Michigan could gain competitive advantage from it.

One of the big worries that surfaced was the uneven distribution of computers and Internet access through the society. In relatively wealthy counties like Oakland, as many as 50 percent of all households have home computers and modems. But in poor and working class areas, the penetration of IT drops to near nothing.

Speaker after speaker argued that not to equalize the distribution of computers throughout our society would inevitably lead to the kinds of conflict that followed the Industri-



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al Revolution. But the commission was unsuccessful in figuring out ways to do it, partly because the cost was high and partly because nobody believed a government body would be efficient enough to do it.

Now the distribution of IT throughout society is going to come about through the simple device of employer self-interest in a competitive global economy.

What was particularly striking about the Ford move is how it resonates with the Ford family history.

Remember, it was Ford chairman William Clay Ford Jr.'s great-grandfather, Henry Ford, who carried the consequences of the Industrial Revolution to Michigan in the early days of this century when he perfected the assembly line in manufacturing.

The exponential increase in labor productivity brought about by the assembly line made it possible for Ford to pay his workers at the previously unheard-of rate of \$5 per month.

Now, nearly a century later, the Fords have produced an equally revolutionary and far-reaching idea based on similar insights about productivity.

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## State could be perilous for Bush

John McCain is pretty much running state to state at this point, says his Michigan campaign coordinator Sen. John Schwarz (R-Battle Creek).

No doubt about it, his presidential candidacy against front-runner George W. Bush got a significant shot in the arm by his 18-point victory in the New Hampshire primary. And the reaction here was immediate. In the days after the vote, volunteers were calling McCain's state headquarters in Grand Rapids to sign up at the rate of one every minute, Schwarz said.

"I've spent more time with the media in the last 30 hours than I have in the last 30 years," Schwarz said. "There's been so much ... he (McCain) couldn't buy that kind of publicity."

This month is the critical time for McCain. Bush already has enormous support nationwide. With legendary networking skills, Bush has already built "grassroots" organizations throughout the nation, his backers say. He certainly has a hefty campaign war chest.

Bush also has the Republican loyalists working for him. From Gov. John Engler on down through the legislative ranks, a majority of the players in Michigan GOP politics signed on to support George "Dubya" long ago.

The key to keeping the McCain candidacy alive then, Schwarz said, is for his supporters to take his new-found resources - volunteers and contributions - and deploy them swiftly and intelligently between now and Feb. 22.

With only a few primaries left before Super Tuesday, McCain has to keep the momentum going - in South Carolina Feb. 19 and in Arizona and Michigan on Feb. 22.

Would a loss in Michigan kill the McCain campaign?

"Certainly a loss in both South Carolina and Michigan would pretty much put a cap on it," Schwarz said. "He's running state to state and he would be out of money heading into Super Tuesday."

Arizona is McCain's home state. South Carolina is small by comparison. That makes Michigan strategically significant to the point that we'll see a presidential primary campaign here in the next couple of weeks unlike anything we've seen before.

The state Legislature's decision to move up the primary election date to Feb. 22 was



MIKE MALOTT

believed to have its political ramifications. GOP leaders said it was done to increase the state's profile in the primary, but critics believe it was more intended to give Bush "aid and comfort" heading into March 7.

And it may well backfire on them, Schwarz contends. "... Probably 21 or 23 per-

cent of Michigan voters are devout independents and ticket splitters. A majority of them will vote for McCain," Schwarz predicted.

There's yet another factor that may make the outcome of Michigan's primary even more difficult to get a handle on - Democratic crossover. We're likely to see a lot of that this year.

In some previous presidential primaries in Michigan, voters have been asked to name a party preference. That's gone now. And in most other primaries, typically, the voter is confronted with a choice - vote on the Republican ballot or the Democratic ballot. Mixing tickets cancels out the vote.

That's not the case this year. In fact, with the Democrats voting in caucuses on March 11, their primary balloting doesn't even take place the same day. According to the Secretary of State's office, there is no cross-checking taking place to assure that voters don't cast ballots in both contests. The parties may be "officially discouraging" it, but from what I can tell there is little real reason why voters should avoid voting twice.

Dems want their votes to count, to have an impact, as much as anyone. And their own party admits things will pretty well be decided between Al Gore and Bill Bradley by the time its caucuses roll around.

It's been thought McCain's position as the moderate Republican was a political liability. That's not likely to be true in Michigan. Crossing Dems, it seems to me, are more likely to look to him than to Bush, or Steve Forbes, or Alan Keyes.

Michigan was once thought to be Bush country. It may turn out to be perilous territory for him.

Mike Malott reports on the local implications of state and regional events. He can be reached by phone at (248) 634-8219 or by e-mail at [mmalott@homecomm.net](mailto:mmalott@homecomm.net)

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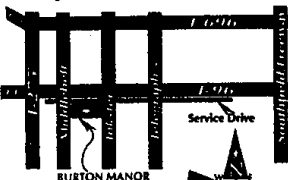
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