

POINTS OF VIEW

Lansing: Where you can't 'really admit what's going on'

Lucky legislators from the tri-county area were shuffled off to the Big Mac recently to hob-nob with the captains of industry at the annual Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce gig. It was a huge freebie with the anointed legislators bedding down at the Grand Hotel in return for listening to the pro-business agenda stuff promoted by business types.

Most consider it a fair trade and included on the "A" guest list from Oakland County were Reps. Andrew "Don't Call Me Rocky" Raczkowski, Nancy Cassia, Robert Gosselin and Pan Godchaux and Sens. Gary Peters and Willis "Please Can I Be Drain Commissioner" Bullard.

Gov. John Engler last year pulled off a well-timed goodie for all the attendees as lawmakers voted within hours of getting on the boat for Mackinac Island to phase out the state's unpopular single business tax. OK, it will take 22 years for it to expire, but what the hey. It was a fancy dish to set before the corporate kings.

The governor sought to repeat history with another historic vote on the eve of this year's convale. Mr. Engler

hoped to have telecommunication deregulation well on its way to final approval and prayed for similar action on re-regulating the state's monstrous electric utility industry. And Democrats, believe it or not, are helping him with his wish. But beware of Democratic help in sheep's clothing.

Several weeks ago, Senate Democrats were balking at the governor's plan, which included a fifty election-year 5 percent rollback in monthly electric bills for Detroit Edison and Consumers' Energy customers. Since the governor wanted a bi-partisan vote on the plan, he was willing to listen to the Dems for a change. Can you say Monte Hall let's make a deal?

Well, the Democrats talked about electing the current Engler-appointed Public Service Commission which oversees the utility industry. That never got to first base. Actually it never got out of the dugout.

Then the Dems huffed and puffed about hiking the rollback to 10 percent.

That failed, too. In the end, however, there were enough Democrats vot-

QUEST COLUMBIST



TIM SKUBICK

ing yes in the 25-12 tally to send the measure along to the House for more debate. Did the Democrats just give up? Nope. They had a hidden agenda.

None of the Democratic leaders will confirm this on the record, but they were eager to send the hot potato over to the House to make some election year hay for Democrats who are running for re-election. Senators are not up for another two years so Democrats delivered no haysmakers in that body.

Here's the drill: House Democrats will offer all sorts of self-serving amendments to the bill hoping to force the Republicans to vote no. The list of far-fetched ideas might include exempting all senior citizens from any electric bills or reducing bills for the truly needy ... whomever they are.

Democrats hope Republicans will reject those notions. Then in the House races this fall you can look for some TV ads that say something like, "Republicans Kill Rate Relief for Seniors," or some theme and variation.

Remember Democrats desperately want to regain control of the House and even if the ads are misleading and irresponsible all is fair in love and re-election campaigns.

Republicans will be forced to explain to the uninformed electorate that the Democrats were only playing politics and it was grossly irresponsible to cut rates too far. After all that would damage the bottom line of the utilities and who wants to do that? Certainly not the GOP pro-utility gaggle.

Democrats would love the GOP to stick up for their pals at Edison and Consumers Energy. TV commercials on that would follow. Anyway, you get the picture.

So the bi-partisan Senate vote had nothing or very little to do with the merits of the electric re-regulation stuff. As is so often the case in our

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town, what you see is not what is going on. The Democrats didn't want to give overwhelming support to the governor's plans, but they wanted to move it along nonetheless with hopes of whacking Mr. Engler and Co. in the fall House elections.

Confronted with his strategy on camera one Senate Democratic leader fogged an answer that talked all around the point of trying to gain a political advantage on this issue. Then with the camera safely turned off, there came a huge smile and the true confession, "Sometimes you can't really admit what's going on."

How true, how true. Welcome to Lansing.

Tim Skubick is the Lansing bureau chief for WWJ-950 radio, as well as producer and anchor of the political affairs show, "Off the Record," seen on PBS. He will write a monthly column for the Observer Newspapers.

LETTERS

Feelings expressed

Just recently I found out about the editorial you wrote on April 20 saying that "Honoring Vietnam vets is right to do - RECOGNITION."

I want to thank you for stating the situation regarding the controversy over having a tribute to the Farmington men lost in the Vietnam War included in this year's parade in such a beautiful way. You expressed my feelings exactly.

Originally I wanted to make a plea for the surviving Farmington Vietnam veterans, many of whom knew my son, to come out and take part in the parade in honor of Kenny and to let us honor them. Also, this is a special year for us because Ken would have been 50 years old and he was killed 30 years ago. When we were not going to be allowed to even make any mention of him, it was very disheartening.

Thank heaven for the intervention of the Oakland County Vietnam Veterans and the agreement to let us have a wreath placed at the ceremony after the parade. I also really appreciate your saying that next year Viet-

nam veterans should be given much more attention. I still hope that these events will stir patriotism and respect for Ken and the buddies he enlisted with, and who later served as his pall bearers. I don't see how anyone can continue to ignore the sacrifice he made for them and all of us by trying to forget that the Vietnam War ever happened.

It is very satisfying, though, to see the start of a recognition process in Ken's hometown, and also to find organizations such as the Oakland County Vietnam Veterans and other nearby American Legions who would have welcomed a chance to honor a fallen comrade and a Gold Star Mother.

Thanks again for your editorial and also for all the coverage Tim Smith has given us. The articles have been very well done - accurate and in-depth. The additional interviews with other concerned parties have been excellent, too.

Helen W. Robertson
Commerce Township

What to do?

Recently learned that the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills have passed ordinances limiting the size of trash cans and yard waste disposal cans or bags to no more than 30-32 gallons or 60 pounds. Supposedly this will help Waste Management Inc. reduce workers compensation claims for back-related injuries.

I understand similar ordinances are already in place or proposed in numerous other communities.

Without a doubt it is an inconvenience to replace current trash cans. However, my concern is a bigger problem.

The cities have not provided any suggestions regarding what to do with our current, unusable trash cans. Since it has no other use, how do you throw away a used trash can?

B. Galvin
Farmington

Composure maintained

I used to be a Democrat. They used to appeal for tolerance. Now they are intolerant. Laura Baird (D-Okemos), in a childish display of disrespect, typifies the New Democrat by "giving the finger" to state House Majority Leader Andrew Raczkowski, R-Farmington Hills, while in the House of Representatives during a legislative session.

This kind of juvenile emotional reaction is what really makes the "New Democrat." When they disagree with someone, they will distract, shout them down, or do something which in effect says, "I am intolerant of your beliefs and I do not respect your right to express them."

As the Democrats adjust to being in the minority perhaps they should learn some proper manners. Giving people "the finger" is no way to impress them with your legislative skills. Kudos to Andrew Raczkowski for maintaining his composure in the

face of the children on the other side of the aisle.

David M. Hansknecht
Farmington Hills

On wrong track

The Million Mom March has gotten vast media coverage despite the fact that they are often hysterical, illogical, and their goals are unconstitutional.

It has been proven that states that allow concealed gun permits have lower crime. The keys to lowering gun violence are prosecuting criminals who use guns to commit their crimes and educating children in the safe use of guns.

Lori Johnson
Holland, Mich.

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