

No telling where exporting Michigan waters would stop

Water just might be the most important and valuable thing we have in Michigan.

Whether it's the clear water in our streams, the rippling waters of our inland lakes or the water in the mighty Great Lakes - the largest source of fresh water on the planet - water is what makes Michigan.

It's not only the source of much of the remarkable quality of life in our state, but experts predict that as the world wide shortage of water intensifies, our water will become an enormously valuable resource.

So when somebody starts dabbling with our water, Michigan has to get raised right quick.

President George W. Bush found that out last week. According to the Toronto Globe and Mail, Bush said he wanted to

talk to Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien about piping Canadian water to the parched American Southwest.

"Our nation must develop a comprehensive water strategy, particularly as these western states continue to grow," the newspaper quoted Bush as saying during a meeting with a group of reporters. "I'm from a part of the world where... there was no water," said Bush, adding that when world oil prices crashed in the early 1980s to less than \$10 a barrel, water seemed more valuable than oil.

The President's remarks set off a firestorm. A spokesman for Prime Minister Chretien said that if Bush raises the issue, he will be told Ottawa has long opposed such a move. Canadian Environment Minister David Anderson said, "The Prime Minister will tell the President that we have a policy of not exporting water and that, I guess, will be it. I imagine it will be a brief conversation."

U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, who represents the Upper Peninsula and northern lower Michigan, told me "I'm just surprised at how cavalier his comment is or what a dangerous a precedent it could set. He doesn't seem to recognize the sensitivity of people about this subject."

The issue is more consequential than the casual comment of a politician who grew up in the dusty oil fields of Texas and whose first instinct is to treat most liquids as though they were oil. By treaty, once water is moved commer-

cially across an international border, it becomes a commodity regulated by free-trade rules. That means any entrepreneur could imagine a business filling tankers with Lake Superior water to ship to Saudi Arabia or building a water pipeline to, say, Midland, Texas.

What is troubling about the President's remark is the underlying mind-set it reveals: A natural resource is something to be exploited for economic gain, not to be preserved for future generations.

Worse, once the export of Great Lakes water starts, there's no telling where it might stop. With water levels in the lakes already declining to record lows, I'd hate to see oil industry logic - pump it until it's dry, then go drill another well - applied to our water.

What is troubling about the President's remark is the underlying mind-set it reveals: A natural resource is something to be exploited for economic gain, not to be preserved for future generations.

Basically, the President was suggesting that if lots of people are moving where there is little water, the thing to do is figure out how to get the water out there regardless of the environmental consequences or the impact of international law.

Nothing about ways to conserve water. Nothing about the idiosyncrasy of subsidizing water shipments to arid regions to encourage further development that has already outrun the capacity of existing natural resources to sustain it. Nothing about the effect upon a state and region whose very identity is bound up in water - as much as Texas' is bound up with oil.

This is not a trivial issue. In the next election, Michigan will lose a seat in Congress as a result of population loss, while southwestern states will gain. The balance of federal political power will shift away from Michigan.

Gov. John Engler, who has argued that control over Great Lakes water ought to be left in the hands of the states that border them, might want to use this episode as a teachable moment to help his friend, President Bush, understand he's now something more than merely the governor of a parched state.

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@homecomm.net



Joni Hubred

Pageant should make adjustments to include all media

Those who read both the Observer and the Northwest Gazette - don't deny it, we know some of you do - will notice a

significant difference between their coverage of the June 18 Miss Farmington pageant and ours.

We have quite a few more pictures, for one thing. They have one shot of Miss Farmington, Tracey Finlayson, taken in the Founders Cafe tent after the pageant. There's a reason for that, one that has all kinds of explanations and begs several questions.

I've talked to quite a few people who attended the pageant, and the first point everyone makes is that the Civic Theatre, while a charming and convenient setting, is far too small for this event. The lower level quickly filled to capacity; standing room tickets were sold.

Still, a small section was reserved for The Press. Our At Home editor Mary Rodrigue, Farmington reporter Sue Buck and our intern, Cara Ploewy, took up three of those seats. Observer photographer Bill Bresler used a fourth when he wasn't dashing around taking pictures.

Gazette editor Della Cassia was nowhere to be seen. And thereby hangs a tale.

Cassia, who is well known in our community, said when she showed up at the door, she was told there was no room for her. If she wanted to cover the pageant, she'd have to stand in aisles. For two hours.

Our crew had to conquer a bit of miscommunication, but got in. Rodrigue said pageant director Ginny Morris told her there would be a ticket for our intern, but there was no "ticket" labeled for the Observer. She asked to speak to Morris; a while later, someone else showed up to escort them to the press seats.

Morris told me later there were no "press passes" as such. My second suggestion - after moving the pageant to a larger venue, like... say... an auditorium in a high school near downtown Farmington - would be to start issuing formal press tickets or passes, to clear up confusion at the ticket booth.

That's all this was, Morris said. There was no intent to shut anybody out.

The Gazette doesn't feel that way. In a stinging editorial published Monday, the newspaper accuses Morris of threatening Cassia over a cartoon that ran July 9. It depicted a young woman complaining that she wasn't picked "Founder's Festival queen."

Morris said some pageant contestants and their parents were upset about the cartoon, because they felt it labeled unsuccessful con-

tants as "losers" and referred to the "Queen" appearing in her "elegant gown and tiara."

"The gown and tiara is not what it's all about," Morris said. "That was taken by a lot of contestants offensively."

So much so, the Gazette claims, that Cassia was told if she showed up at the pageant, she should expect to be confronted by angry pageant supporters. The paper believes Cassia was denied access at least in part because of the cartoon.

Morris denies banning the Gazette. If the board of directors has to issue an apology, she said, that's what'll happen. But she also said Cassia showed up after the pageant started, with two guests, and shouldn't have expected to get in so late in the game.

We know this much is true: A Gazette employee was given short shrift in her attempt to cover the pageant. And that just shouldn't happen. Not in this town, not for this event.

No matter what time Cassia arrived, she should have gotten a seat, especially since pageant folks had already shown our crew to the press section. While it's not their obligation to provide press seating for anyone, it would have been the fair thing to do. The right thing to do.

Part of me wants to argue pageant supporters need to lighten up. It was just a cartoon. But that's not really the point, is it?

Respect is a two-way street. If you're going to complain about someone else's lack of respect, you ought to go out of your way to make sure you're showing respect for them.

Making life difficult for a reporter covering this event - even if this was all just a big misunderstanding - didn't accomplish that.

I'm not going to try to figure out whether the cartoon crisis was connected to the pageant scandal. Everybody's got a side in this; I have no secret tapes revealing conversations that took place between Morris and Cassia.

But I know it just doesn't feel right that our three reporters AND a photographer got seats at the standing-room-only Miss Farmington pageant and the Gazette didn't get one.

The Founders Festival and the pageant are events during which we expect to set aside our own friendly rivalry with the Gazette and share in the community-wide celebration. In that spirit, we hope the pageant board considers making some changes next year to ensure everyone is treated fairly.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments; write to 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48336; call 248-477-5450 or email jhubred@oe.homecomm.net

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