

## Just-ended election season contributes to somber mood

The votes are still being counted as this column is being written, so attentive readers will be spared a didactic discussion of who won, who lost and what it all means. But a few reflections on the campaign just passed might be in order.

Of course, with so many races and ballot proposals up for grabs, it was one of terrible clutter on the TV screens — not to mention the spams of automated phone calls. The ordinary, earnest candidate with a decent message and speaking at a civilized volume level simply got drowned out.

We all know it by now. Nobody likes our fixation with negative political advertising on TV. But mostly it works, unless it's done in a truly tasteless manner, a la Dick Posthumus' attempts to inject racial and geographic divisions into the campaign for governor. Most everybody slammed the ads as politically ineffective and morally wrong.

Indeed, one of the big surprises of the campaign was the editorial revision in last Friday's Detroit News, a usually conservative newspaper that had previously endorsed Posthumus. Written by publisher Mark Silverman and running under the headline, "Why GOP's race-baiting strategy is self-defeating," the op-ed piece was eloquent and compelling. Future candidates might want to take note of one of the piece's conclusions: "If a candidate can't put his foot down to stop a misguided political campaign on his behalf, how can he be expected as governor to stop equally troubling policy initiatives?"

However they got there, the people who will be running Michigan for the next few years will have a tough row to hoe. It's not just the horrific budget situation facing our state — deficits exceeding \$1 billion for this fiscal year and the next are looming — but the people who will have to deal with them are largely new and relatively inexperienced.

Term limits mean that 30 of 38 state senators are new to the office, as are 53 of 110 members of the house. Neither Jennifer Granholm nor Posthumus has any experience as governor, nor do their candidates for other top jobs like lieutenant governor, secretary of state or attorney general. On top of that, some 7,500 highly experienced state employees will be leaving their jobs by the end of the year, the product of an ill-advised early retirement scheme produced by the Engler administration to try to stop the budget red ink.

Gov. Engler himself is no fan of term limits, which he thinks create a "disconnect" between candidates and office holders and the voters. What might be worse is the short-term culture induced by limited terms in office. House members are now out after three two-year terms and senators after eight years. That's not a lot of time

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to learn the ins and outs of legislating and the highly pressurized and political atmosphere this provokes in Lansing actually works against sensible policy-making.

I sat next to former Speaker of the House Bobby Crim at the U-M/MSU football game last Saturday. He was eloquent about how things got done in the days before term limits, when legislators actually had the time and the incentive to get to know each other and when political debate for show in the legislative chambers was followed by quiet attempts to find some middle, compromise ground for the common good. I fear those days are long gone.

Two other reflections are contributing to my somber mood. I'm concerned that Proposal 4, a shockingly greedy and cynical attempt to amend the state constitution so as to allocate some \$300 million in tobacco settlement public money each year to hospitals, nursing homes and the like may preview other attempts to circumvent ordinary budget-making procedures by means of constitutional amendment. When all the reports are in, I suspect the Proposal 4 campaign — funded mostly by the Michigan Hospital Association — will have spent more than \$5 million. Rich, single-interest groups may get the idea they can get done by constitutional amendment what they cannot through the political process.

And I'm very concerned about the economy. The auto companies are reporting sharp sales declines for October, while the unemployment rate is sliding up and businesses are reluctant to make long-term investments when war is threatening. This newspaper ran a small help wanted ad for a clerical position in our corporate office a couple of weeks ago; we were swamped with applicants.

If a "double dip" recession is on the horizon, the jobs of the next governor and legislature just got a whole lot tougher.

Phil Power is the chairman of the board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2047 or at [ppower@homecomm.net](mailto:ppower@homecomm.net).



Joni Hubred

## Diversity seminar shows there's still much left to do

A great deal has been done to promote diversity in the communities of Farmington and Farmington Hills, but as I left the recent seminar focused on that issue, one thought ran through my mind: There's so much more left to do.

Diversity seems a bit of a moving target. A decade ago, it was about racial tensions in our schools and overt acts that motivated people in the community to do something.

Today, it's about why so many people want to live north of 12 Mile, why so few people know their own neighbors and what the community has to offer its young people. It's about parents not talking to each other and people not saying the things they feel.

Incidents of overt racism are few and far between. Earlier this year, a church under construction on Dresden was vandalized with a message of religious bigotry spray-painted on one of its outside walls.

The point is gone, but what of the sentiment behind it?

Nobody burns crosses in Farmington Hills, but one businessman talked about young, black men on his staff who don't feel comfortable driving through the community.

"They're tailed," he said.

Now, I know Police Chief Bill Dwyer passionately supports fair treatment, and officers are trained to be sensitive to issues of culture and racial profiling. But I'm not a young, black man driving through Farmington Hills who has experienced a lifetime of people holding me under suspicion because of the color of my skin.

So much work to be done.

Take the simple issue of semantics. Facilitators Shea Howell and Kevin Earley, representing the Michigan Chapter of the National Conference of Community and Justice, talked about the conversations of consequence, which almost never happen when we inadvertently offend someone. We say, "I didn't mean to offend you," after what we felt was an innocent comment.

Howell explained such a response nullifies the consequence or offense. Saying "I didn't mean it" doesn't allow us to learn why our words caused pain.

There's a difference between prejudice, which is a thought or feeling, and discrimination, which denotes overt acts, like denying someone housing or a job based on skin color or other factors outside their control.

The consultants brought that point home with an exercise that started with all participants standing in loosely formed lines in the

middle of the room. With commands like, "If you've ever been battered, take a step back" and "If your parents owned their home, take a step forward," everyone eventually landed either at the very back or the very front of the room.

Position was based solely on elements that were totally outside their control.

"The people in front were there because of the privilege of accidents that came to them," Howell said.

The concept of "us" and "them," she added, is not an act of will. "What is an act of will is what we do with what we've got."

Some had easier lives than others. Some had parents who gave them more. Some created extraordinary lives of giving and caring out of a background filled with challenges.

And everyone had something to say. The room vibrated with the energy of ideas new and old, with the resonance of well-aged wisdom and boldness of youthful passion.

As we all explored our personal heritages, some knew a great deal and others, hardly a thing. Strong families emerged as a common element in most backgrounds. People worried about the cultural forces that are pulling families apart — neighborhood isolation, lives that are too busy.

So much left to do.

And where do we start? The group will meet regularly during the year to draft a new mission statement that will better define the future of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural Multiracial Community Council.

Howell and Earley will be back to guide the discussions. And the 100 or so people who were involved will begin the real work of change, in their own families, classrooms, businesses and neighborhoods.

Included among them are students and seniors, parents and single adults, people of many colors and many faiths. They have in common a caring heart and the willingness to sacrifice time and energy to help pave the way toward a new understanding of community.

We accomplished so much over those two days.

And there's still so much left to do.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments at 3341 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; by phone, (248) 477-5450; by fax, (248) 477-9722; or via e-mail, [jhubred@oe.homecomm.net](mailto:jhubred@oe.homecomm.net).

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