

Granholm's speech breaks the pattern

As I watched Gov. Jennifer Granholm deliver her State of the State speech last week, I realized that over the years I've heard a fair number of SOS speeches given by various Michigan governors.

G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams' nasal twinge disguised the bluest of blood mixed with an emerging citizen-participation Democratic Party that clashed repeatedly with a highly partisan, GOP-dominated Legislature. George Romney, who rode to office on a reform movement called "Citizens of Michigan," offered a less-partisan but higher-key salesmanship. Republican Bill Milliken, facing a Democratic Legislature, was low-key and bipartisan, reaching out to suburban voters and "Milliken Democrats."

In more recent years, Jim Blanchard's State of the State speeches often wound up as mind-numbing catalogs of ideas, programs and initiatives; some of us even referred to them as a list of "Jim's greatest hits." Of course, Blanchard faced a state budget crisis situation nearly as grievous as that confronting Granholm today. His solution — hiking the state income tax rate — made perfectly good sense as public financial policy. But it was a political disaster that led to the recall of two Democratic senators. The state Senate has been Republican ever since, and don't you think for a second that Gov. Granholm has forgotten that episode.

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Neither Engler's nor Blanchard's speeches were particularly inspiring and, excepting Engler's ceaseless emphasis on tax cutting, none were particularly focused. And neither of them was particularly effective or emotional in their delivery. Granholm's speech was quite different. It was capably written, warmly delivered and well-received — she was interrupted more than 50 times for applause. Granholm's speech even reached for inspiration in setting out Michigan values of hard work and grit and in inclusively reaching out to the variety and creativity of Michigan citizens for their help in getting through a very, very difficult budget problem. The stuff about tugging up every old pad of paper, even with "Gov. John Engler" on it, was just great. She was tightly focused. Jobs and economic development: "No one will

outwork me, outrun me or out hustle me when it comes to keeping or bringing good jobs to this state." In an environment Granholm's highly-powered panel on land use (co-chaired by Milliken and former Attorney General Frank Kelley) will be for the first time seriously address the long-festering problem of sprawl.

Lastly, human capital, especially early childhood education: "By the time a child arrives for kindergarten, 83 percent of the brain is developed," she said. "If a brain is purposely stimulated and nurtured before a child is old enough to tie his or her shoes, that child's lifelong capacity to learn will be forever enhanced. And, unfortunately, if it is not, an opportunity is lost forever."

Most political observers praised the speech, using terms ranging from "inspiring" to "well-intended." But one observer grumbled that the speech was short on specifics. If I were facing a next year's deficit of nearly \$2 billion, I wouldn't be very specific either. I seem to recall an old lawyer's advice that "if you've got the law on your side, argue the law; if you don't, go promptly to emotion."

I also suspect there is a very interesting case of novel thinking lurking in the interest of this budget crisis, one that Granholm hinted at in her speech. For years and years, virtually all state government budgetary activity has been incrementalist, i.e., cut this by X percent, increase that by Y percent. Very rarely has either governor or Legislature shown the political will or the conceptual imagination to deviate from this routine. But this budget crisis is so severe — the projected deficit for the next fiscal year is nearly 20 percent of the total state general fund — that the consequence of necessity may turn out to be a radical rethinking of what state government should or should not do and how to go about doing it.

Granholm and her husband, Dan Mulhern, are both extraordinarily good people. They have the capacity to be not beyond their capacity to have in the back of their minds creating an unusual platform for a Democratic politician, one that actually forces a fundamental and strategic rethinking of how government ought to work. By so doing, they would escape the "tax and spend" tag with which big-government Democrats have been labeled for decades and at the same time advocate for a government that carries out its important functions in a focused and cost-efficient way.

Hang on. The politics — not to mention the speeches — of the next four years might turn out to be very different than anything we have seen in Michigan so far.

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.

'West Wing' distracts from discussion of war

I stopped watching *West Wing* about six months ago. Friends found this shocking, as *West Wing* is unquestionably the best-written show on television. It is also considered a sort of prime-time mecca for liberals such as I.

Say what you want about Aaron Sorkin's personal life, the man can make fictional characters seem real. Half the country would vote for Jed Bartlett if his name appeared on a ballot. He's the kind of leader who inspires confidence with a combination of erudition, genuine humor, warmth and a clear, yet altogether human, moral compass.

I started watching him again because of a conversation I had a couple of weeks ago, one I can't seem to get out of my head. Someone asked, "If you had to decide today, would you say 'yeh' or 'nah' to the president's plans to go to Iraq?"

"We're already at war," I said. "That wasn't the question." It wasn't. So I said, "I have a 23-year-old son who is a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves. No, I don't want us to go to war."

Around the table, everyone agreed. We were all parents and grandparents, all horrified by the idea of sending our nation's best and brightest once more unto the breach.

No, I do not want the United States to declare a war that has almost no hope of eliminating the real threat to world peace. With all due respect to Mr. Bush, the "axis of evil" argument doesn't even make sense. The axis of evil lies at the heart of humankind; it's the darkness we hide within ourselves. Evil isn't a force embodied in one man or even a nation, it's a pervasive intolerance, a natural condition betrayed by jealousy, anger, bloodlust and hatred.

It's everywhere. And good, not might, destroys evil. Yes, I'm biased. Of course, I'm biased, same as every other parent before every other war. I don't want to wonder every day where my son is, whether he's dead — or worse, alive and suffering.

I want my son to have a long, happy and healthy life. I want his marriage to last long enough for a golden anniversary celebration. I want him to enjoy his children and grandchildren, to find a career that brings him joy and

satisfaction. My son is a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves, and I couldn't be more proud. But I'm afraid none of his dreams will come true now. Our president has made it clear we cannot, as a nation, allow the terror to continue unchecked. On Sept. 12, 2001, I would probably have believed him.

Now, I'm not so sure. The justification for war seems less clear. Unaccounted for weapons, the potential for world domination, evidence of torture, these all make a compelling case, but for what? Some say more investigation. Others believe a delay will only mean more lives lost.

It sounds horribly selfish, but I care about one life: that of my son. I want him to never know the hardships soldiers faced in Desert Storm or Vietnam or Korea. When he looks back on his life, I wish him only the most wonderful memories, not those of death and destruction. I don't want his life irrevocably altered by acts of war ordered in the name of peace.

If there is war, I pray it will be swift and certain, so very few military units will be deployed. I pray this fully realizing I am also praying for the deaths of other mothers' sons and daughters.

I know louder voices than mine will prevail. Our president most likely will — with or without our allies — declare war against a fanatic, hate-driven force so pervasive it challenges all that is good in our world.

Somewhere in a small foreign land, people who wish to gain more power for themselves are likely amassing chemical weapons so powerful, even a small drop proves deadly. Somewhere in the heart of our own land, officials who already have a great deal of power stand ready to deploy forces to make sure those weapons aren't used.

So I watched *West Wing* again last week and felt somehow reassured by a president in whom I have the utmost confidence, a man with a quick enough wit that I laughed even though the story line included the horrors of ethnic cleansing in a tiny African country.

It was a good show, with at least one happy ending. I liked that part best.

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