



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Legislature Brings Us A Mixed Bag Of Christmas Presents

The Christmas season has come, the Legislature has adjourned, and we now have a chance to open up all the fifty little packages the lawmakers wrapped up in the past few weeks to put under our tree.

That nice box over there with the palm trees on the paper - you know, the one that beautifully tanned legislative secretary brought us all the way from Florida - is the "working" trip some of our lawmakers took to the sunny south a couple of weeks ago.

Inside the box (eleven, wasn't it, to make the cardboard smell like martinis?) is a group of legislative leaders who probably learned something when they weren't on the golf course and a passel of lame duck state representatives who won't be around for the next session and who had the arrogance to figure they could con the taxpayers for an expensive and totally pointless trip.

Reps. John Bennett from Redford Township and Ray Baker from Farmington went and say they learned a lot. I don't dispute their right to go, but I hope they're right.

THAT NICE package hidden away behind the tree, all prettily wrapped in \$10 bills and smelling like a rotten egg is the dog racing bill.

The measure would have established dog racing as a legalized form of gambling in Michigan, might have enriched various communities around the state (none in this area, a bastion of horse racing) probably would have brought a clutch of very questionable people into contact with a very large amount of money, and certainly was the object of about as fierce and blatant a lobbying campaign as has been seen in many a year.

"Study trips" to Florida and Arizona dog racing tracks were being thrown around like snowflakes, and even the leadership of both parties was used as a conduit by dog racing supporters to move money to state legislators up for re-election.

The whole smelly operation was finally squelched by the Republicans in the State Senate, who killed the bill for this year on orders from Gov. Milliken. It remains to be seen what will happen next year, but I for one hope the whole messy campaign has made everyone attached to it so embarrassed that they'll just go away.

THAT LITTLE package at the top of the tree, all wrapped with Geritol labels, is the fancy new legislative pension which pays

\$7,650 per year after 16 years of service, which can be taken at retirement at age 55.

This one was sneaked through the Legislature at the last moment, with virtually no warning and much confusion, after the State Compensation Commission ruled that legislators didn't need another pay raise just now. The legislators decided to feather their own nest in this way, although the federal Pay Board may hold up the plan on grounds that it exceeds federal guidelines (which it does).

Voting for the bill were Sens. David Plawecki (Redford Township) and Dan Cooper (Southfield); voting for it in the House were Reps. Stempien (Livonia), Brown (Westland) and Forbes (Southfield).

Voting against the bill was Sen. Pursell of Plymouth, and Reps. Baker of Farmington, Smit of Ann Arbor, Defebaugh of Birmingham. Not listed as voting were Sen. Faust (Westland) and Reps. Young (Dearborn Heights), Bennett (Redford Township) and Tierney (Garden City).

Depending on how you feel about pensions and/or adequate notice before considering a money bill of this sort, one may

send these gentlemen: (1) a Christmas card, (2) a request for a loan, (3) a snowball (wet and soggy), (4) a nasty letter. (Check all or none.)

THAT ODD package which looks just like a glass cage with a little doll-like figure of a reporter securely inside it is the move that's going on in the State Senate to coop up reporters inside cages so they won't wander around the floor and disturb the wise men while they are debating bills and voting and such.

Most reporters think it's not much more than retaliation on the part of some senators for unfavorable publicity they have received for various misfeasances of duty during the past year and especially over the Florida trip.

Some thoughtful types who worry about freedom of access for the press see more sinister overtones behind the whole thing, but the more cynical among us incline toward the view that state legislators, like most politicians, still cannot understand that if a public figure does something silly he ought to be criticized for it without feeling paranoid.

ONE GENUINELY nice package the Legislature left under our tree is the mass transit package, which finally passed after weeks of hassle.

It will raise the gasoline tax, which is unpleasant, but it does mark the first all-important step toward developing a system of mass transit to serve this suburban area in the way it ought to have been served for years.

Sen. Pursell merits a nice thank you note for this gift shortly after the holidays, since he was one of the key legislators working tirelessly, patiently, and effectively to bring this package successfully to our doorsteps.

ALL IN ALL, it was a mixed bag the Legislature brought us this Christmas.

It's easy to make fun of a lot of the silliness that passes for legislative activity at this time of the year, but the Lansing guys did accomplish quite a lot over the past two years.

I still hope what you, the reader, find under your own tree on Christmas will be better than what they gave you.

Best wishes for the holidays from all of us at Observer Newspapers.

HO-HO-HO!

Open your eyes and close your nose....



Tim Richard writes

If You Really Must Roar Around In A Snowmobile...

The Federal Communications Commission ought to get after the television stations which show promotional films on snowmobiling - films which quite obviously are contributed by snowmobile manufacturers themselves.

You know -- the ones which have lovely string music accompaniment and show babbling brooks with starry-eyed snowmobilers watching them.

They're false advertising. You don't hear string music when you ride a snowmobile. You don't hear babbling brooks. You don't hear chickadees chirp, crows caw, rabbits rustle, oak branches groan, pine needles whisper or anything of the sort.

All you hear on a snowmobile is the flatulent roar of another internal combustion engine, burning up irreplaceable fossil fuel.

THE GUY WHO invented the snowmobile had a pretty good reason for doing so. His name was Emil Bombardier, he lived in a remote part of Quebec province, and he had a son who, if he had survived, would be about the same age as this writer.

But Bombardier's son got sick one winter's day, and there was no way a physician could travel to treat him. The boy died, and the lamenting father invented an excellent utilitarian vehicle for doctors, farmer, law enforcement officers and other travelers.

A utilitarian vehicle -- that's what a snowmobile should be. Unfortunately, it has become a toy. It's a toy that has done tremendous damage to the environment, a great aid to poachers, and a thing of danger that has claimed more lives than it ever saved.

You'll enjoy Michigan winters more on skates, skis, boots or snowshoes than you ever will on a

snowmobile. But if you're such a city slicker that you can't travel without the sound of an engine and the smell of gasoline, then be kind enough to observe the "10 Commandments of Snowmobiling." They are offered by Frank P. Opolka, head of the state Dept. of Natural Resources' snowmobile safety section.

"1. I WILL be a good sportsman. I recognize that people judge all snowmobile owners by my actions. I will use my influence with other snowmobile owners to promote sportsman-like conduct.

"2. I will not litter trails or camping areas. I will not pollute streams or lakes.

"3. I will not damage living trees, shrubs, or other natural features.

"4. I will respect other people's property and rights.

"5. I will lend a helping hand when I see someone in distress.

"6. I will make myself and my vehicle available to assist search and rescue parties.

"7. I will not interfere with or harass hikers, skiers, snowshoers, ice fishermen or other winter sportsmen. I will respect their rights to enjoy our recreation facilities.

"8. I will know and obey all federal, state and local rules regulating the operation of snowmobiles in areas where I use my vehicle. I will inform public officials when using public lands.

"9. I will not harass wildlife. I will avoid areas posted for the protection or feeding of wildlife.

"10. I will stay on marked trails or marked roads open to snowmobiles. I will avoid country travel unless specifically authorized."

Theirs Hardy Prays, Bokays For Speling

Like most adults, I feel childish and "man-who-comes-to-dinnerish" when my mistakes are pointed out to me by children.

Some time ago I was taken to task by several fifth graders for misspelling the word trilobite. I was chagrined and defenseless. I should have known better than to proceed into the realms of geology on faith alone. Although I did look it up in the dictionary, it was not so much to see how to spell it as to see how long ago these little creatures lived.

No no excuses, but some observations...

FEELING VERY defensive indeed, I scanned the fifth graders letters to see what spelling errors I could find in rebuttal.

To my surprise, I found only a couple, but being a nasty adult -- about spelling -- it's enough to launch an editorial.

So bear with me, young friends.

I think it is lovely that you are being taught to spell trilobite correctly. I hope you find some opportunities to use it.

Frankly, in many years of writing, I have never had occasion to use trilobite, and like the purple cow, I really hope I never see it, again.

But I run into "there" and "their" almost daily. I know the difference. One of you doesn't.

There's an old poem which was corny even in my day, but contains a truth which has to be pointed out to every generation. It begins "For want of a nail, a shoe was lost..." and goes on to tell how a whole kingdom was lost for lack of attention to detail.

I'm afraid that we are in danger of losing our written language for lack of attention to details such as "there" and "their" and "its" and "it's."

WHEN YOU YOUNG ladies become brides, will you carry a "bouquet" or a "bokay"?

Do your teachers believe that spelling is not too important -- I've run into many who do, including one who wrote home to inform parents that they shouldn't "worry about the spelling at this stage. It will be 'delt' with later."

How much later?

This is the question many, many employers ask when they hire a new secretary... even for a school system... or when they read a resume.

Recently we received a letter from a school wishing parents a "hardy" welcome. Now this is creative, colorful and realistic, but the usual phrase is "heartly" welcome.

Or, consider the letter from the distinguishing university, advising the parents to write back when their daughter "desides."

I AM A FIRM believer in creativity, color and realism, but realistically speaking, if everyone goes his own way in spelling, there may come a day when we cannot communicate via the written word.

If you don't believe me, get the worst speller in your class to write a paper and try to decipher it.

We see (and sometimes commit) a wonderful variety of spelling errors, but we still keep trying.

We think it's worth the effort.

'Man Is Worth Helping..'

Once again we share with our readers the prayer composed by Emory Daniels, our Southfield editor, for a gathering of Observer Newspapers employees during the holy days:

We thank You for this food and ask that You bless it and the partakers.

We petition You tonight, not only as servants, but as stewards dedicated to the task of the enrichment of Your creation.

As we perform our tasks during the coming year with the intent of uplifting mankind, help us to use the most effective tools -- the tools of love, charity, understanding, kindness and wisdom.

We do not believe that man is evil, debased, helpless or hopeless but instead that man, created in Your image, is productive, ingenious, unfettered and destined to achieve.

We believe, indeed, that man is worth helping and to this end apply our efforts, committing ourselves in the name of the Father, who is our creator and inspiration.

Editorial & Opinion

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