

Opinion

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Recall threat may sap their courage

VOTERS WHO organized the successful recall campaign against state Sen. Phil Mastin are no doubt enjoying the sweet taste of success. They did it. They recalled the first legislator in Michigan history. First they conducted an extensive petition drive to put Mastin to the test. And then they persuaded people to vote against him.

And now the second victim has fallen to the recall. Voters won't have Sen. David Serotkin to blame for their tax bills any more.

In both cases, it was democracy in action — people getting actively involved in their government. But it may have hurt the demo-

cratic process more than it helped.

Many believe the recalls will force other legislators to pay more attention to the opinions of voters back home. "It will make those guys listen to us now."

The sad fact is that they may be right. And in the short run, voters may be able to get their revenge and recall officials who vote for unpopular things. But look a little farther down the road. What will happen to Michigan in the long run?

Our fear is that the threat of recall will give legislators even more reason to waver. A weak Legislature contributed to Michigan's dire condition. Now it will be even harder to find legislators

willing to act with any courage of conviction.

A FUNDAMENTAL difference between recall supporters and opponents is their perceptions of a legislator's role. Is he or she supposed to read his mail and vote for a measure if it engenders more pro letters than con? If so, special interests groups will run this state.

Or is a legislator supposed to listen to voters and lobbyists, read research on the subject, study the budget and arrive at an intelligent decision? If so, voters may find themselves angry at times and in the mood to recall.

To our way of thinking, legislators are elected to be leaders, to

weigh all factors and then make the best decision possible — even if it will be unpopular.

If we don't like the conclusions the elected official reaches, we vote him or her out next time around. Unfortunately, an official's voting record is often ignored in regular elections — though it's paramount in a recall.

The problem with Mastin's and Serotkin's recall is that voters — at least some voters — have sent a message to all legislators: We don't trust you. Do anything, but don't raise our taxes. Don't make any difficult decisions.

IN THE NEXT few years, you'll hear plenty from legislators who "had the courage to vote

against the tax increase." Really, they showed no courage at all. They let the issue become a political one — where Republicans opposed and Democrats reluctantly supported — the increase when both sides recognized it was the only solution, however temporary, to a desperate situation.

Many Republicans who had the "courage" to vote against the tax increase were afforded that luxury only because their votes weren't needed to pass the emergency measure.

There are other tough decisions waiting to be made: How should the state school aid formula be rewritten? How can state bureaucracy be streamlined? How can unemployment and worker's

compensation costs be reduced? How can Michigan rebuild its industry and create jobs?

These are issues that require hard decisions — decisions which may anger voters back home. With the threat of recall hanging overhead, legislators may be tempted to study the issues to death and delay action indefinitely.

As it is, state representatives serve two-year terms — which translate into one year of action and one of campaigning. Now we may be lucky to see any action.

We need courageous leaders — but we also have to have the courage to stand behind them.

oral quarrel

Today's Oral Quarrel asked our readers how they felt about red-light districts where prostitutes could work legally. The question: Should cities establish red-light districts where prostitution is legal?

Following are the responses.

Only if it is done fairly with sterilized men provided for all the young women in town at a cheap rate.

Yes, I think the city should establish red light districts where prostitution is legal.

No, because you will have them all over the place. They will start a thriv-

ing business which is already going anyway.

No, I do not feel the red light district should be permitted in Farmington Hills.

No. That would be one more act God has condemned on which society would be putting its stamp of approval.

I think it is a great idea and I think it would concentrate prostitution in a single area that would be overwhelmingly protected by police officers and better facilitate life for everyone in the city.

You've got to be joking. Aren't the morals of this country in as sad shape as they could possibly be right now? It is all disgusting.

Yes, I agree. There should be an area set aside for this activity.

My only reply to that question is be-

cause of the immoral issue of prostitution, the only obvious place for this to end up is in Hell, Michigan.

The answer is definitely yes. With a district established with proper controls, the people who want to participate can go in that area. Outside that district, it's illegal. . . . the laws could definitely be enforced and it would not be a conflict as it is presently. . . .

Absolutely no.

Absolutely not. It's just another step toward moral decay.

I just can't believe your question tonight due to the fact that your front page pictures showing these three men being being hauled down a corridor in a

goddamn county jail. That is ridiculous. If you can't figure something out more appropriate to the problems we have today, you should disband this thing.

Yes, definitely.

Well, I'm a whore and I don't like to be having to run around illegally.

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