

Opinion

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Utility company twists in the wind

THERE'S A NEW twist to the Consumers Power Co. story this year.

It's nothing new for professional second guessers such as Attorney General Frank Kelley and Joe Tichinsky — the former college English teacher who became an expert on utilities the minute he got a job as the voice of the Michigan Citizens Lobby — to carp at Consumers.

The Kelleys and Tichinskys have long held that Consumers should abandon its Midland nuclear generating plant.

The new twist is that now Wall Street and industry have turned against Consumers Power.

ALREADY THE Midland plant is nine years behind schedule, the cost overruns have been astronomical, and the plant is only 85 percent complete.

The utility can raise the \$1 billion-plus in new capital funds to complete Midland in one of two ways: selling securities on Wall Street or asking the state for a rate hike sufficient to generate enough income that can be reinvested internally.

Wall Street says new securities are out of the question, given the climate in Michigan.

And a group of industrial giants under the collective name of ABATE is telling Consumers Power to forget about completing the Midland plant.

Finally, last week the company set up a travelling road show to sell "community leaders" on their plight and got told off firmly by small business types who say they could never operate the way Consumers Power has.

And in a way, it's fun to see obtuse executives get kicked around.

BUT MORE IS at stake here than seeing an unpopular company twist slowly in the wind.

Even though Consumers Power sells only natural gas and not electricity in these suburbs, the company is essential for all of Michigan's economic revitalization.

When it comes to recruiting industry, politicians may pass the rezoning and get in the middle of ribbon-cutting photos, but it's the electric and gas utility which has

High court glares at all-male clubs

LAST WEEK the United States Supreme Court heard arguments in a case that may have important implications for local clubs.

The specific issue addressed by the court in *Roberts vs. U.S. Jaycees* concerns two Minnesota Jaycee chapters which lost their charters because they admitted women. The Minnesota Jaycees appealed up to the Supreme Court.

Many community organizations refuse to admit women as members. In addition to the Jaycees, there are Kiwanis, Rotary, Exchange, Optimists and Lions. Also, many groups which raise money to support school sports programs — called names like Booster Clubs or Dads' Clubs — often exclude women.

Take the case of Garden City businesswoman Sue Discher. She runs her own business, was the first chairwoman of the city's Downtown Development Authority and is on the board of directors of the chamber of commerce.

Yet, when she applied for membership in the local Lions, Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, she was told "no." They said international bylaws prohibit women.

TIMES HAVE changed dramatically since most service clubs and sports support groups were started.

Today the majority of adult women work outside the home. Many schools have more female than male sports participants. But club rules have not changed.

Sure, service clubs perform important jobs in the community — building a baseball diamond at a local park or raising money to buy computers for the local school district. But for many members, professional contacts made through the clubs are good business. Club friendships open doors for additional sales and can even help land the next job.

It's ironic that while service clubs discriminate against approximately half of the local business people, they desperately need new members.

Regarding Ms. Discher, Garden City Kiwanis Club President Deryl Diaballo said, "If I had the opportunity to let her in



Tim Richard

done the lion's share of the recruiting work.

If Consumers Power can't convince outstate industrial prospects that it can generate enough power to satisfy them without buying from outside sources, then outstate Michigan has a dim chance of sharing in our economic recovery. And a lot of welfare checks go to the Jacksons, Kalamazos, Saginaws and Bay Cities of this state, not only to Detroit.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE for the average industrialist, retailer or news reporter to grasp the enormous complexity of running a power company.

Only a railroad expert could appreciate it, and there aren't too many railroad people around any more.

An electric utility is so capital-intensive that it boggles the mind. Its biggest costs are not wages and materials but capital — interest on the bonds, dividends to cautious stockholders, depreciation of buildings and machinery.

Electric companies — not government — really invented long-range regional planning. They have to calculate customers' needs many years into the future. A simple coal plant takes eight years to bring on-line. A nuclear plant takes 10, 15 or goodness knows how many years to complete and begin operating.

So the whole thing is not as simple as telling John Selby and his several thousand stockholders to write off \$5 billion as a bad investment and ask the chaplain to punch their tough luck cards.

Yes, it's fun in 1984 to see Consumers Power officials suffer and stockholders sweat. But it won't be fun in 1990 or 2000 if Michigan winds up with a knee-high economy because a utility has been brutalized.



Nick Sharkey

the club, I'd let her in in a minute. She'd be an asset to the club. She'd be more active than some of my own members."

CLUBS LIKE Kiwanis may have the "opportunity" for women members soon. According to the New York Times account, the Jaycees' arguments for remaining exclusively male were not well received last week by Supreme Court justices.

The Jaycees were required to show that only by remaining exclusively male could they take on activities protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The Jaycees' attorney was peppered by such questions as: "What interests of young men would be frustrated by having women as members?" (Justice Byron White) and "Can you name one position the Jaycees have taken that applies only to men?" (Justice Thurgood Marshall). The decision is due in early summer.

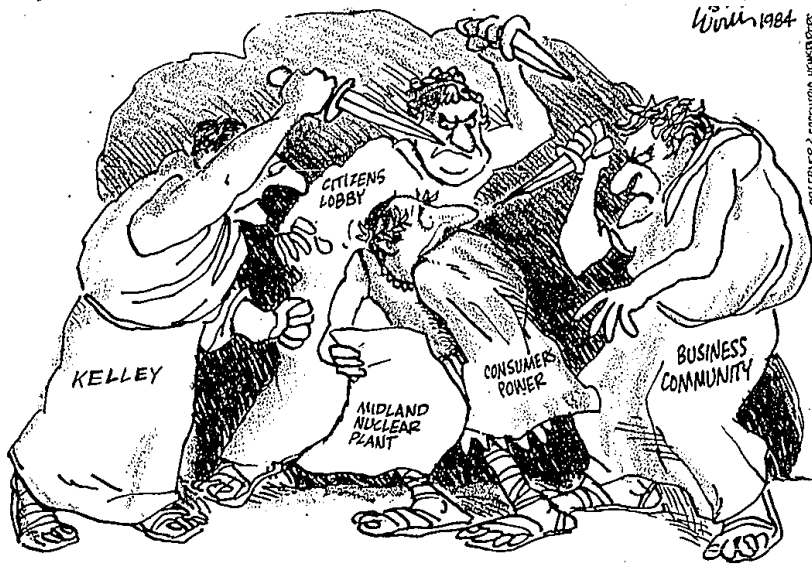
Even conservative Justice William Rehnquist said that while the Constitution may protect all-male membership of "an organization of male chauvinists who got together and said 'we're tired of affirmative action and we want a square deal,' you haven't shown that the Jaycees are anything like that."

It would be impressive if local clubs would reassess their position on all-male membership instead of waiting for a Supreme Court decision.

International bylaws can be changed. If that is not practical, discrimination with the international should be considered. The international needs local clubs more than the local needs international sanction.

All-male clubs are outdated and probably illegal. It's time for change.

'Et tu, Brutus?'



Let's help the poor bar owners



Bob Wisler

Horse Tavern, Ed's Lounge, George's Place.

THEY SHOULD try to impart a sense of what their high calling is life entails. Instead of calling their joints bars, they could call them relaxation centers, mood alteration emporiums, tranquility rooms or pacification salons.

Bar owners could learn from educators and psychologists and use socio-jargon to impart a sense of importance about their activities. A stop at the bar could be called a meaningful socialization experience. Bartenders should be known as "libation counselors" or "therapy assistants."

Bar owners could insist that their clients do not get ripped, whacked, bombed or drunk; they merely deviate from their normal sobriety plateau.

Tavern owners should be allowed to make commercials like beer companies do, showing their taverns full of smiling, young faces, people without a worry in the

world. A TV commercial showing a smiling giant of a man with an arm around a satisfied imbiber could say, "You're in good hands at Big Dan's."

Or, to capitalize on current popularity, how about signing up Clara Peller of Wendy's fame? She could stick her distinctive face over the bar as two old lady companions grimace at their gin and tonics and bark at the bartender, "Where's the gin? I don't think there's any gin in there."

PERHAPS the answer may be a federal subsidy to provide incentive not to serve drinks. The government pays cotton farmers not to grow cotton, wheat farmers not to grow wheat and so on. What's wrong with paying bar owners not to serve drinks?

The government would surely come up with an equitable formula. For example, after a 6-foot imbiber weighing 185 pounds has consumed 4.8 drinks, he would be adjudged to have reached the stage of maximum deviation from his sobriety plateau.

At that point, the government could say the bar owner would be subsidized for not serving more drinks to that imbiber until the deviation from sobriety has been minimized by passage of three quadrants of an hour for each ounce of certain types of alcohol already consumed.

That's where the bar owners should go. The answer lies in a government program.

THEY COULD learn from the National Rifle Association, whose bumper stickers and commercials extol the American way of shooting animals.

Bar owners could put out a bumper sticker saying, "Drinks don't kill people — drunk drivers kill people."

Or they could call themselves sportsmen and have commercials featuring distinguished looking ex-bankers who read Proust and attend the opera but are now engaged in serving imbibers. "We are the bar owners of Michigan," the ad could say.

Bar owners are unimaginative in naming their establishments. They call their places such things as Joe's Bar, Wild

Wizard's voice has been stilled

THE VOICE of the Wizard of Words has been stilled, and the press box of Michigan Stadium never will be the same now that Wally Weber is gone.

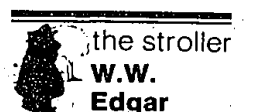
Wally, a fullback on the 1925-26 teams, which Fielding H. Yost claimed were the best he ever coached, later served on the Michigan coaching staff himself. His death has left a void that can't be refilled.

A close follower of the game, he headed a group of veterans each fall weekend to watch and criticize the team as it moved up and down the field.

In the group were Ray Fisher, a pitcher in the 1919 World Series and later the Michigan baseball coach; Bennie Oosterbaan, three-time All-American and football coach in the '50s; Cliff Keane, the wrestling coach, and Less Etter, public relations chief whom Crisler brought to Ann Arbor from Minnesota.

The only survivor is Keen. The Stroller, who always has been welcomed as a guest each fall Saturday, will join with him to keep the memories alive.

FISHER WAS the first to leave, and he was past 90 years old. Next was Etter, who had retired and devoted his life to writing children's books. Oosterbaan was not a regular attendant in later years.



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

But always you could depend on Wally Weber, and even though cheering is not allowed in the press box, you could hear his comment on every Michigan play.

Wally, although considered an outstanding fullback, never made the All-America team, but he could do more with the English language than any other person The Stroller knew.

He could stretch one syllable into 16, hold an audience almost spellbound or double it up with laughter. Until a year ago, Wally was one of the most sought-after dinner speakers in the Middle West.

On his football days, when he had Oosterbaan and Benny Friedman — two All-Americans — as teammates, Wally liked to tell how a defeat one Saturday helped the Wolverines capture the Big Ten title the next.

IT WAS after Michigan had conquered

Navy 54-0. On the return trip to Ann Arbor, Navy gave the Wolverines "the works," as Wally put it.

The Wolverine players were felled from the moment they arrived and were hauled as the greatest team in the country. Even at night, they were treated royally at dinner. As Wally recalled it, during the wee hours in the morning, the chimes rang out near their sleeping quarters.

This foisting of the players had the desired effect for the hosts. Navy won the game. So angered were the Michigan players that they made easy victims of the Minnesota team with the Big Ten title at stake.

It was one of the great garrison finishes, occurring in the days when the game for the Little Brown Jug was the most important of the year.

WALLY ALWAYS got a laugh when telling that story of his playing days.

It was one time when a defeat made Michigan winner of the more important game for the conference title.

It was one of Wally Weber's favorite after-dinner tales, and it is just too bad that he won't be with us any more so the younger generation could hear this Wizard of Words.