

Opinion

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U.S. public judges by twin standards

WHAT'S WRONG with the press? Only federal government executives, television and Congress receive lower confidence ratings from the American public, according to the National Opinion Research Center.

The result of the poll is a sad commentary in itself. And an ironic one.

WITH THE exception of federal government executives over whom the public has little control, the public is in a position to greatly influence those institutions it claims to mistrust.

The fact is the public doesn't influence them. And the actions of the public might even hint that the public speaks from both sides of its statistical mouth.

Consider how many hours, day after day, the American public sits in a trance-like state in front of a television set. But television received a confidence rating of only 12.7 percent.

If the public so lacks confidence in television, why is it such a powerful force in our lives? Why do advertisers scurry to pay thousands of dollars for a 30-second spot during Dallas? Why is the video recorder the hottest sales item since the CB radio?

Congress received a 10.2 percent confidence rating. Significantly, the poll was taken during a period when no major scandal like Abscun or Watergate was in the news.

If the public is so mistrusting of its congressmen, why does it keep returning them to Washington? With a term of only two years in office for a representative, wouldn't you expect to see a tremendous turnover rate — thanks to the public's mistrust?

GETTING BACK to the press, the research center reported the public gave it an anemic rating of 13.7 percent. Why this lack of confidence?

A survey commissioned by the American Society of Newspaper Editors has some answers about what readers want —



Marilyn Fitchett

but again, the survey delivers a mixed message.

For example, the readers were critical of editors who are preoccupied with national and international news. Yet readers said they wanted more explanation, more information, more background and more maps concerning such news — but reported briefly.

Readers, the survey found, want more local news. But they always seem to have a perception that the other side of town gets more coverage than their side, that the other high school team in town gets more ink than their team.

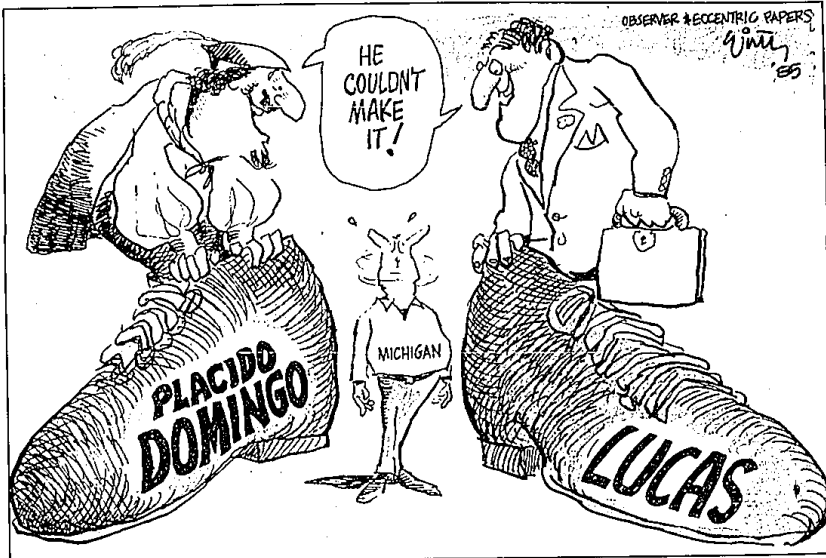
Readers want crime stories — so long as the crimes reported did not happen in their neighborhoods. Graphic detail is OK in a story about a plane crash, but not in a murder story.

Readers complain that community commentators seem to favor some organizations and disregard others.

THERE'S NO doubt the press can do a better job than it does. But can it ever satisfy a public that applies double standards? How can a newspaper report crimes that occur in no one's neighborhood?

Maybe we want to believe that our neighborhood is crime-free, our congressman beyond reproach and our television selections of impeccable taste. Yet we all gain some ghoulish satisfaction reading about a judge on the take, a politician arrested on morals charges or a minister dipping into the church till.

So the next time I read a survey about the lack of public confidence in the press, I'll know you weren't talking about us.



We get the understudies

IF THE Metropolitan Opera can do it, why can't Bill Lucas?

All year long, opera fans were subjected to lots of tantalizing publicity about how the Spanish tenor, Placido Domingo, made the great leap into the realm of Wagnerian opera with the title role in Wagner's "Lohengrin."

Well, the Met is coming to Detroit next month. But will Domingo be there opening night to sing "Lohengrin"? Nope.

Will James Levine, music director, conduct "Lohengrin" and Verdi's "Simone Boccanegra" as he did in New York and on the radio broadcasts? Nope again.

It seems to go like that every year. Critics on the Detroit papers have taken the Met to task for sending us the understudies.

The dailies tell us this year or next might be the last Detroit visit of the Met. Considering the esteem in which the New Yorkers hold us, we might as well patronize Michigan Opera Theatre or those splendid student productions (in English) in Ann Arbor.

WHAT DOES this have to do with the Wayne County executive?

In his first months in office in 1983, Lucas would attend meetings of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. That's where elected officials from seven counties put their heads together on long-range planning strategy and learn to respect one another.



Jim Richard

spect one another.

Later, Lucas would send one of his chief assistants like David Plawewski and Frank Wilkerson. They were men with clout in their own right, though it would have been preferable to have Lucas himself.

Looking over the attendance roster at the last four SEMCOG meetings, we see that Lucas was represented twice by David C. Hart and twice by Vivian Allison. Who are they? It took Lucas' extensive press office a few minutes to look up their job titles.

Hart is a research assistant who reports to Jim Bowman, director of research. Allison is an executive assistant to Wilkerson and works in County Commission relations. Shades of the Met.

OAKLAND COUNTY also has an executive, Dan Murphy by name. Murphy has been a faithful SEMCOG delegate. A Republican, he served two years as SEMCOG chairman, indicating the esteem in which

the Democratic-leaning organization holds him.

At the last general assembly meeting when Lucas didn't show up, the featured speaker was supposed to be Gov. James J. Blanchard. For whatever reason, Blanchard couldn't make it.

So who was his pinch hitter? Murphy. And Murphy was forthright: He said SEMTA had to be reorganized with a smaller board, he backed Cobo Hall expansion, and he told them the downtown People Mover would be completed, period. Lucas, as I have pointed out with weary repetition for several months, studiously avoids meetings where someone knowledgeable might challenge him. Rotary and Kiwanis clubs are easier to woo.

MEANWHILE, Lucas' office announced that his weekly television show — produced by his office, not by a political campaign committee — has added Grand Rapids, East Lansing, Kalamazoo and Southfield cable stations to its list of outlets.

Their bullfeathers alibi is that the exec wants to build respect for Wayne County. In truth, he's campaigning for higher office with Wayne County resources. Clearly, he is neglecting his contacts with, and knowledge of the problems of, the elected officials of the 100 members the SEMCOG. If the Metropolitan Opera can get away with it, why can't Bill Lucas?

from our readers

Rural life disturbed

To the editor:

My husband and I live on a little, dead-end, dirt road called Metroview. How little? Ten houses long and 1 1/4 cars wide. We and our neighbors really don't mind having a muddy car most of the time. The condition of the road discourages tourists. Or I should say did discourage tourists. Last summer I picked at my petunias in my robe, coffee cup in hand, and loved listening to the birds. This summer that moment will not be realized. Last year I had to fill the bird feeders twice a week. Now it's every other week.

The reason is that last fall the progress of mankind's determination to conquer this planet literally hit home. The woods which graced the other side of our little dirt road were torn down. The shrill sound of saws tore at our eardrums and hearts from the first light of dawn until after dark, six days a week. Then came the disturbing vibration of cement trucks. Now tourists from the subdivision drive down Metroview just to check the connection which will be made by their sub one day soon. Our peaceful homes on a little dirt road will see an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 cars each morning and evening. So now we residents have to pay to pave the road.

How can this be? We still aren't sure and are reluctant to accept it. (It's been a great way to get to know my neighbors. One guy was telling us how he used to hunt deer with his father in those woods.)

Well, back in 1978 the residents voiced objections to the Planning Commission and the City Council. Their objections fell on deaf ears, and the alternatives available at that time were not pursued. We have never been told why.

Only that the plans were approved, and that's all there was to it. However, we have been told that it was expected that Metroview would be paved by now. It isn't paved because the people who live on it like it quiet, unpaved. We

have been to numerous City Council meetings since the woods came down, trying to prevent the connection from being made. Although council is sympathetic, the builder built to the plans that were approved.

No, Virginia, you can't fight City Hall. Korea Wegienek
Farmington Hills

Anti-smoking bill supported

To the editor:

Residents of our Farmington community should take special pride in supporting Michigan's Clean Indoor Air Act, recently reintroduced by Senator Jack Faxon of Farmington.

Fourteen thousand Michigan deaths last year were linked to cigarette smoking. Our organization frequently helps people cope with disastrous medical, psychological, and financial problems also linked to smoking. Perhaps those experiences have made us eager to support non-smoking, clean indoor air for all residents.

We congratulate our legislators and urge a speedy passage of this pro-health legislation.
Dr. Bruce Dubin
The Asthma & Emphysema Association of Michigan

discover Michigan

As the state of Michigan grew from a territory to a modern state, so did its judicial system. The bulk of all criminal cases and civil suits are handled by circuit courts.

The history of circuit courts in Michigan dates back to 1824 when only three judges of the territorial Supreme Court held annual terms in the counties of Wayne, Monroe, Oakland, Macomb and St. Clair.

1 kind of TV gets better

LIVING IN this so-called sophisticated society, we sometimes miss the excitement. Even when it's going on right in front of our faces.

Take television, for instance. Whoa! Slow down. You heard it right the first time — television. And let me tell you, folks, a real knock-down, drag-out fight is going on in that industry — right now.

Sure, I know, I know. Television just isn't cool. Nobody watches it anyway. Of course, that's just hogwash. Television is an important part of your life.

MOST PEOPLE watch it more than they ever would admit. And most enjoy it — another small detail they often forget to mention.

Just think, if you watch television a half-hour a day, you've spent approximately 182 hours in a year viewing. That's about four work weeks worth — more than many spend on vacation. And most of us watch more than one-half hour a day.

In truth, so many folks have watched so often that the competition is getting tougher. This battle for your time has become a major preoccupation. And while you may be reluctant to admit it, television is better than ever before. It has more to offer to more varied interests than ever.

But it is a battle — especially for the folks at the public television station.



Steve Barnaby

WHEN PUBLIC broadcasting came on the scene in metropolitan Detroit, the rules were simple. Competition was clear cut — three network stations, an upstart independent over at Channel 50. Then came a few other hybrids — Channels 20 and 62 and that strange aberration across the river — the CBC.

No problem. Public television had a different mission, said backers. It would offer the programs that would be untarnished by the ratings battle and untainted by advertising.

We all would be able to sit back and enjoy the classical concerts, operas, ballets. You name it, the classics would be safely ensconced on the public airways.

All sounded good at the time, except for one thing: Television is a lousy medium for the classics. Besides, what viewers said they wanted to watch and what they would watch were found to be two different things.

WELL, THE BROADCASTING waters have been muddied even more with the advent of cable television.

Some thought cable would spell the end of struggling public television. But luckily for the likes of Channel 56, cable is having its own problems.

And for those of us who believe that public television is an important element in the broadcasting industry, this is a week of celebration. Yet another auction week will be in full swing until Saturday. Viewers are responding, casting a vote for an ideal in broadcasting. Goal is \$822,700.

Sure, the worn transmission facilities are something less than desired. The hoped-for alleviation of the annoying reception problems proved less than successful. That new antenna didn't make Channel 56 ghosts and goblins leave the screen.

But public television is still hanging in there. The local outlet even has spawned a national media celebrity of its own, Dennis Wholey.

And the programming is getting better. Public television gurus have learned that mass appeal isn't all bad, and the formats have been loosened up accordingly.

After all, public television is just for that — the public.

Can't wait until the next round.