

# Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Bob Sklar editor/477-5450

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## Civil rights

### Listen, understand the issues

THE NAACP convention, which held center stage and front page in Detroit for nearly a full week, is gone. But, it is hoped, not forgotten.

For its chief message — that the dreams and aspirations of blacks and other minorities are being seriously threatened now more than any time since the civil rights gains of the 1960s — is an important one.

The rhetoric that came flying off the convention floor was strident, even shocking to some. Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, said the organization would lobby for intervention from President George Bush and the U.S. Congress to bump out the dents in civil rights caused by recent Supreme Court rulings. Falling that, Hooks said, "we must call upon our citizenry to mount such powerful demonstrations that the group who gathered in China not long ago will look like a few compared with the millions that we mobilize to let America know we ain't gonna let nobody turn us around."

That's strong stuff. Maybe it's necessary, though. Civil rights leaders have taken the quiet road for years — since the riots tore Detroit and other cities apart more than two decades ago — and where has it gotten them?

DURING THE 1970s, they faced U.S. administrations (Nixon, Ford, Carter) that were long on rhetoric, but short on action. Under President Reagan, even the talk dried up. The words "civil rights" became kind of an antiquated whisper, trotted out occasionally when the administration took time to point out the emergence of a black middle class.

The Supreme Court — shaped largely by Reagan — seems intent on carrying out his vision when it comes to civil rights. In rulings this term, the court has:

- Made it harder for state and local governments to enforce minority quotas on businesses.
- Given whites more leeway in filing reverse discrimination lawsuits.

## Lucas lesson: Revise nomination standards

WE AGREE with the Senate Judiciary Committee's rejection of William Lucas as the nation's civil rights chief.

But we disagree with a confirmation process that leaves political nominees, like Lucas, dangling like a worm on a hook before so many angry piranhas.

The Lucas nomination process has been an ugly, noisy spectacle. There are lessons we believe both the president and Congress should learn to restore a sense of balance and fairness to future nominations.

Given the amount of public humiliation faced by political nominees and given the fact that most could probably earn much more money, with much less aggravation, in private sector jobs, it's a wonder we can attract any men and women of quality into our federal government.

If relatively minor past transgressions and unproven allegations can be trotted out for public consumption — as they were in the Lucas case — the confirmation process becomes less a test of the nominee's background and qualifications and more a target shoot for politicians eager to make points with home constituencies through a display of righteous, though selective, moral indignation.

## Quality of life Towns that plan will win out

REMEMBER LAST Nov. 8 when voters of the state of Michigan approved passage of Proposal D?

Well, some communities across the state are about to reap their local share of its benefits.

Friday is the deadline to request a chunk of the first year's grants of nearly \$16 million from the state Department of Natural Resources' new Quality of Life recreation bond program — launched as a result of the vote.

No tax increase is involved. The bonds will be repaid from the state's general fund. The program is expected to run about five years.

A number of our local communities want in on the action, but it's only those who have thought ahead about their needs that have a chance.

For one thing, a master plan for parks and recreation is a must, so communities such as Troy and Garden City are out of luck.

For another, they must have some money of their own available, since the state will fork over \$3 for each \$1 spent by the local communities.

Projects will be based on the basis of the community's commitment to parks and recreation and the merit of the individual project.

### Civil rights leaders have taken the quiet road for years . . . and where has it gotten them?

- Limited the grounds on which women and minorities may seek legal redress for discrimination.

The American Civil Liberties Union has called the court's actions "disastrous . . . the end of an era in which the Supreme Court is the principal guarantor of rights for the individual."

GIVEN THIS kind of "progress," many blacks feel it's time to turn up the volume of their mission.

In turn, the mission for white suburbanites is to understand why blacks feel backed into a corner and not to lose sight of how the attitude toward civil rights, from the Oval Office on down, affects them.

Segregation — by race, religion or economic class — is much more than just a physical separation. It's one group of people mentally beating down another, telling them they're not good enough to share the same bus, hold the same job or live in the same neighborhood.

And the racism that leads to segregation is still out there, even in the affluent, supposedly well-educated suburbs. A biracial Farmington family has been forced to erect a stockade fence around their back yard to help deflect ethnic intimidation.

It's as if our national leaders have decided civil rights is a non-issue, something they took care of with all that progressive legislation 25 years ago. Certainly, they seem to be saying, it doesn't warrant constant attention like the deficit or other important issues.

So if the black community decides it needs to shout a little louder to be heard on civil rights, we shouldn't run for cover. We ought to be listening, and listening hard.

play of righteous, though selective, moral indignation.

IT'S FAIR to ask: Are members of Congress holding political nominees to standards they themselves wouldn't be able to meet?

What is needed, both from the Oval Office and Capitol Hill, is a "good faith" nomination standard.

Nominees should be selected on the basis of broad adherence to the principles of the department they are tapped to head, as well as their experience in the field and demonstrated administrative skills.

And they should be judged precisely according to those standards.

That said, the Lucas nomination should still be rejected. Lucas lacks experience in handling civil rights cases, his tenure as Wayne County executive was disastrous and his commitment to civil rights goals is sketchy at best.

The goal here isn't to save Lucas but to assure a better quality of future nominees.

Adoption of such a good faith standard would make the confirmation process more like a job interview and less like a stay in the public pillory.

WHAT, IN FACT, are communities asking for? Across the Observer & Eccentric area, it ranges from:

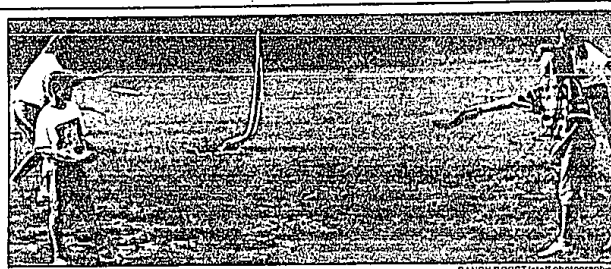
- An historical theme park in Rochester Hills to a community center in West Bloomfield.

- Development of a day camp facility at a park in Farmington Hills to new athletic facilities at a park in Southfield.
- New equipment and/or facilities to renovate parks in older sections of Livonia and Farmington to Canton's bid to develop 50 acres of passive recreational land to include an amphitheater and a man-made lake.

In a state blessed with natural beauty surrounded by the Great Lakes, open areas and family recreation facilities drive right to the heart of our quality of life.

Attention to local needs is particularly important in urbanized southeast Michigan where booming development and the problems it brings has slowly pushed parks and recreation lower on the scale of priorities.

The Legislature, by putting it on the ballot, and the voters, in approving the bonds, have recognized that.



RANDY BOHST/staff photographer

### Something to do

Thanks to the Sum-Fun Roundup hosted by Farmington, Farmington Hills, the Farmington Area YMCA, the Community Center of Farmington-Farmington Hills and Oakland Community College, local teenagers have something to do this summer. At a teen picnic last week in Heritage Park, Jodie Barr-

inger (left, foreground), 12, and Laurah Klepinger, 13, play a game of Scoop while Jodie Whitehead, 14, and Julie Holst, 13, toss a Frisbee in the background. Andrea Newman, 13, succinctly put in focus the roundup's worth: "It's nice to have this. I haven't done anything this summer really."

## Toxic threat underlines hard rezoning decision

TALK ABOUT tough decisions!

No matter which way the Farmington Hills City Council decides, there won't be satisfaction.

Both sides have real concerns. Fearing more traffic, a bigger building and evening hours, the Hillside Estates Homeowners Association is backing developer Melvin Kaftan's bid to rezone 14½ adjacent acres from office service (OS-1) to industrial research office (IRO) on Drake, north of Grand River.

Hillside board members are satisfied a 1988 IRO ordinance amendment allowing city planners to review proposed uses, hold a public hearing and impose special conditions will keep out toxic chemicals or waste and "safeguard all citizens who are on or off Drake Road," said John Jaworowicz, vice president.

"It's the lesser of two evils," resident Eldon Funk said in comparing OS-1 to IRO.

BUT RESIDENTS of two neighboring single-family subdivisions, Independence Hills and Independence Commons, oppose, deviating from the city's master land use plan. They fear health and environmental dangers, unwittingly making the Hillside Estates looks the bad guy.

"Toxic wastes leaking into the streams and rivers, and billowing clouds of toxic fumes, certainly are not the circumstances here," vows



Bob Sklar

Leonard Siegel, Kaftan's architect.

Even though IRO would bring less traffic, a smaller building and limited hours, "health considerations far outweigh aesthetic considerations," said Independence Commons board member Greg Kocak.

"How sure are we — regardless of EPA regulations, regardless of city and state regulations — we can guarantee 100 percent the safety of our environment, especially so close to our homes?" asked Chuck Leonard, Independence Hills president.

The rub also opposes truck traffic and industrial encroachment north on Drake.

TRYING TO satisfy both groups of residents, the city council tabled deciding whether to enact the zoning change until Sept. 25 — until it can meet with the planning commission and size up the toxic threat.

Frankly, it would've helped if the neighboring subs had raised their fears last year, when the IRO ordinance was revised to give city planners greater say over IRO projects

near residential areas.

Meanwhile, councilman Phil Arnold is calling for an ad hoc committee on toxic/hazardous materials.

Its charge: to evaluate city policies regulating the types of permitted materials and determine if existing controls are adequate.

Arnold foresees a committee of five to seven people, with technical or environmental backgrounds, recommending such protective measures as limiting IRO sites and uses.

BEFORE THE city council resumes deliberations in September, these questions need to be answered:

- How legitimate is the fear that toxic chemicals or waste could accompany firms in an IRO zone?

- Why are IRO zones allowed near multiple-family complexes but not single-family subdivisions?
- Are city planners sufficiently versed in research and development to recognize the subtleties of toxicity when considering proposed IRO uses?
- Can the city really keep tabs on the up to 100 firms scheduled to locate in the proposed IRO zone to assure toxicity never comes into play?
- Most importantly, why didn't the city have a handle on the toxic threat before permitting IRO zones in neighborhoods?

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

### Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

### Don't deny free speech

To the editor: On July 20, the Observer published an article about the pro-life banner carried in the Founders Festival parade by the Knights of Columbus of Farmington Hills.

A politician (Dan Dolan) and a few others objected to the banner's "Respect Life" message. Many people along the parade route warmly applauded the K of C banner, however. I loved it!

I hope Jody Soronen and the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce will not act on the complaints of a few in denying these fine Catholic gentlemen an opportunity to participate in next year's parade with their uplifting Christian message.

Are not the Knights of Columbus entitled to free speech, too?

Joyce Nill, West Bloomfield

### Bigotry — an outrage

To the editor:

The recent incidents of racial harassment of a family in Farmington are an absolute outrage. Those responsible for any criminal actions should be caught and punished.

The overwhelming majority of Farmington's citizens do not harbor

the evil prejudice that compelled these destructive acts. The few individuals responsible — wherever they live — have cast a stain over the rest of the community that will take a long time to disappear.

We all regret that these things have occurred right in our own neighborhoods. Our community, just as our nation, benefits from having people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. How stupid it is for a few bigots to forget that.

To the unfortunate victims of this harassment, we hope you live with us many peaceful years in Farmington, far past when this misfortune is forgotten.

Patrick Anderson, president, Farmington Area Republican Club

### Highest bid a better bet

To the editor:

About the July 17 story, "Old Arnold Home goes to low bidder," the object of a bid is to take the highest bidder.

The bids: Michael Von Steeg, \$1,600; Patrick and Marilyn Welch, \$4,375; Jerome and Rosa Flum, \$6,000. The bid should have gone to the Flums.

If you are not going to favor the highest bid, then eliminate bidding. Then you can take whatever amount of money you want for these historic homes.

It seems to me that Mayor Terry Sever and councilman Ben Marks

are the only ones looking out for the taxpayers.

The action awarding the home to Michael Von Steeg, on the recommendation of the Historic District Commission, was most unfair.

Leonard Weems, Farmington Hills

### 2 profiles inspiring

To the editor:

You're to be commended for recently printing two interesting stories about young people who have had to overcome extreme health problems.

The article about Beth McEvilly's battle with cancer introduces us to a brave, determined young woman. I admire her for her strength and courage in handling her illness so well, and wish her good health and happiness in her upcoming marriage. With her positive attitude, she can be a wonderful example to us. Your article on Mike Logan shows us a young man who, due to spinal bifida, has had many obstacles to overcome from childhood on, and he's done it. I know Mike and he's a fine, compassionate person. Whatever career he chooses, he'll make a contribution to society.

Thanks for printing these articles. They're inspiring and give us a glimpse of some of the fine, courageous people we have in our community.

Margie Malovina, Farmington Hills

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