

# Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

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## Free speech

### Pickets louse it up for everyone

**T**HE CRUMMY, BOORISH behavior of a few pro-life proponents has caused Big Brother to step into West Bloomfield and put a regulatory clamp on freedom of expression.

Yo, pro-lifers: got any plans to erode anything else in the Constitution or Bill of Rights? On April 2, the West Bloomfield Township Board passed an emergency ordinance banning picketing directed at a single household. It goes into effect immediately.

The board's action is an example of a cause/effect relationship.

Last month, a clot of pro-lifers took it upon themselves to take their battle directly to the homes of people they believed to be doctors who performed abortions. They picketed in front of the home of one Orchard Lake doctor. The rest of their misinformed band of happy privacy invaders visited the private residences of 20 other people they believed to be doctors who performed abortions.

WE RECEIVED an advance call telling us they would picket. The woman who called said they were going to picket the homes of "those who grind the bones of babies to dust for a living."

The pro-lifers were so pleased with the media event, they've suggested that next time, as soon as Mother's Day, Sunday, May 13, they might do it again, targeting doctors in West Bloomfield, Farmington Hills and elsewhere.

On April 2, the township board received information about that Mother's Day picket, hence the enactment of the emergency ordinance.

Enough already. The pro-lifers' twisted interpretation of the First Amendment's right to freedom of expression crudely and thoughtlessly exploited and violated an individual's Fourth Amendment right to freedom from invasion of privacy.

The pro-lifers violated the spirit and intent, if not the technical letter, of the law. Their overheated rush toward righteousness has caused

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a government body (actually a second government body — Bloomfield Hills already did the same thing for the same reason) to step in and do a very serious thing: regulate how one can express one's opinion.

EVERYONE IN this community, pro-choice or pro-life, should be upset about that and publicly censure this group before its actions cause the dilution of some of our other freedoms.

The pro-lifers could take a lesson from a guy who pickets in front of a Lathrup Village clinic on Southfield Road between 11 and 12 mile. All winter, this man has been pacing in front of a clinic, in any weather, on the shoulder of the road, with signs against abortion.

His spirit, if not his stand, is to be admired. He clearly believes in his cause and is not a fair-weather pro-life advocate. He has a right to picket that clinic and is exercising that right to its fullest.

It takes a lot to stand in front of that clinic, daily, in rush-hour traffic, and have people honk, yell and swear and give him the finger. It takes true conviction and courage.

It is a coward who makes a public fight private and tries to justify such bullying tactics in the name of the unborn child.

Clinics are public places. Picket them as you wish. Homes are private retreats. The lengths to which you have taken your cause do not justify the result.

## A world away

### Faraway events touch suburbs

**W**HEN THE 50-caliber machine guns chattered and democracy died last June in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, someone on a college campus in Rochester Hills trembled.

When a Romanian despot was overthrown in the most violent method imaginable, prayers of thanks were offered in a Troy church.

When several ice dancers decided they'd had it with their homeland, Soviet People's hell, they figuratively skated away to freedom on the ice of a Bloomfield Township rink. For them, Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms came too late.

And while thousands chipped away at that symbol of oppression in East Germany, so many from our Oakland and Wayne county suburbs had much more than a passing interest in watching with delight as the Berlin Wall tumbled.

Momentous events a world away leave their marks on our suburban psyche just as an earthquake seven thousand miles away leaves traces on the paper of a seismograph. And quite often, it's a lot more than just a trace.

Our newspapers offer a seemingly endless line of city council and school board news, lunch menus, senior citizen activities, high school sports and all the other stuff of life in suburbia.

IT GOES ON and on like that. Life's predictable . . . and a little dull. The most important thing in our town that week is, say, the decision of the city zoning board of appeals or a spat over the words in some silly school play.

But then one morning we wake to find that there's been a massacre, a war's been declared, a wicked regime has fallen and another is on its way. Is that somebody else's news? Something for only the big city daily papers and the CBS Evening News?

We look around our communities from Oakland Township to Garden City and discover that

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it is our news, too, because our people are caught up in those events.

Four days prior to the massacre of Chinese students in Tiananmen Square, Donald Foster of Garden City had daily tried to convince students to leave the square before government troops moved in. He told his story to our newspaper.

There were other witnesses to the tragedy in the People's Republic, and many of those witnesses were our readers. They returned safely to tell their stories.

THE RECENT reforms sweeping Eastern Europe were little help to Michaela Olivova, a native Czechoslovakian who lives in Troy — and wants to stay. It sounds incredible, but it's true . . . or it was true in January when we told the story.

Michaela would have a better chance at political asylum here had the Czech regime been a little more oppressive.

For area residents with ties to Romania — and that includes the Rev. Benjamin Cocca of Troy's First Romanian Baptist Church — it was the best Christmas ever, even though no one really knew what was going on in the country of his birth. His was another interesting story to tell.

Speaking of Romania, how about the Bloomfield Hills family who opened their hearts and homes to an orphan from that nation?

Of course, our "worldly" connections weren't only with Eastern Europe and the People's Republic. Consider the Rev. John Wallace, pastor of Lota Valley United Methodist Church in Redford Township.

Wallace had a whole of a story to tell in March after returning from Nicaragua, where he was a member of a watch delegation invited to observe the Nicaraguan election.

There were Russian students in Rochester and at Birmingham Groves, and our students visited Russia.

These are just a few examples of how our Detroit suburbs have become part of the crush of world events. We know we've missed a bunch.

But we thought it was worth mentioning. Life in our communities is more than just lunch menus and zoning decisions.



## New law is small step forward for education

THE WIDEST gap between diagnosis and prescription is not in medicine. It's in education.

Ten years have passed since we were warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in our public schools. Since then, we have been bombarded by diagnoses of the malady.

You pick: We need more teachers . . . better trained teachers . . . more authority for teachers . . . more money . . . classroom discipline . . . a longer school day . . . a longer school year . . .

Teachers unions are too powerful . . . too many administrators with too much power . . . and so on.

A COMMON diagnosis: We have not spent enough on kindergarten through 12th grade schools. The easy prescription: Spend more.

And we have. Last year, total state expenditures on education topped \$2.5 billion, up 58 percent from the \$1.6 billion five years ago. The results?

For 17 years the state Department of Education has tested achievement levels in reading, math and science for grades 4, 7 and 10. Over the past 10 years, scores have drifted up — an average of 18 percent for mathematics, 8.5 percent in reading.

Spending 58 percent more to get 18 percent better results isn't cost-effective. The prescription didn't make us well.

Another common diagnosis is that the way we distribute money among

school districts is unequal and unfair. Evidence supports this. The level of spending per pupil in rich districts such as Farmington or Southfield is as much as three times that of poor districts such as Detroit or Iron Mountain.

A prescription has been hard to find. The state Legislature last year couldn't agree on how to equalize the way dollars were allocated to districts. So lawmakers ducked and put two quite different plans on the ballot.

Not surprisingly, both were defeated.

NOW THERE'S ANOTHER attempt to get from diagnosis to prescription. Gov. James Blanchard recently signed a bill giving new powers to the State Board of Education to oversee local school districts on the basis of performance — what kids actually learn.

House Bill 4009 empowers the state board to set up a "model core curriculum," though it stops short of requiring particular courses. It does require schools to set knowledge goals or risk losing state aid.

In extreme cases, it gives the state power to send in a special administrator to run a school that fails for three years to meet the accreditation standards — or even close it.

The law requires districts to work out improvement plans, including "goals based on student outcomes for all students." Their plans are to spell out what all students are expected to learn. Schools will start to



**Philip Power**

be held accountable for what students achieve.

This is important. For years, schools tended to focus on getting kids to graduate. A diploma was the index of performance.

But employers screamed they were hiring kids with diplomas who couldn't read, write or think their way through a simple problem. All a diploma proved was that a kid had been an inmate in a school for a suitably long time.

COUNTING DIPLOMAS was to concentrate on an irrelevant thing: process (how long a kid has been in school). The right thing is to concentrate on outcome (what a kid actually learns).

The new law will help correct the mistake. Despite what politicians say, House Bill 4009 is not a silver bullet which alone fixes our problems. But it is a step forward.

These days, be grateful for small favors.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His state and national award-winning column will appear periodically.

## 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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

### Chief Dwyer is supported

To the editor:

Please allow us to go on record supporting Police Chief William Dwyer's position that the contract between the Farmington Hills Police Officers Association and Midwest Publishing Co. is not in the best interest of the police department nor the community it serves.

This type of telephone solicitation is more than questionable; it is objectionable.

Only 15 cents of every dollar is given to the POA, and the Farmington Public Schools have already stated that they will not use any material provided by Midwest.

We have possibly the finest police department in the state. We have a proactive, responsive group of men and women who have served our community honorably.

We hope that this contract will not be implemented and that Midwest will see that the residents of Farmington Hills cannot be duped.

We further hope that the city council will give its utmost attention

to the legitimate grievance matters of pension and retirement of the police officers who have completed appropriate years of service and deserve the fairest treatment that our city can provide.

Alex Keurejian, chairman, Citizens Crime Prevention Advisory Committee Farmington Hills

### Ski flying story good

To the editor:

Pat Schutte's article (with photos by Dan Dean) was an excellent portrayal of the thrills, excitement and electricity experienced by being in attendance at International Ski Flying at Copper Peak in Ironwood.

Yet Pat recognizes that words and photos alone cannot do total justice to this sport as he concedes, "Seeing is believing, yet you won't believe your eyes." He's absolutely right.

How does one "experience" the thrill of a skier flying further than Kirk Gibson can hit a baseball,

where the "hang-times" are six times greater than the best of Michael Jordan, and where a 60-yarder, like the Joe Montana TD kind, would only be considered "a bomb?"

Yes, Copper Peak ski flying is America's premier sporting event, but you've got to be there to believe it.

A million roses to the Observer & Eccentric for an outstanding article. Charles Superczynski, Livonia

### Doc Doyle informative

To the editor:

Just a note to let you know that the columns by "Doc" Doyle about education are both relevant and timely.

More people are today taking an interest in the educational process and this column is indeed helpful. I find the answers given to be reflective experienced responses to the variety of readers' questions.

William J. Kloote, Northville

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