

Opinion

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Misleading?

That endorsement quote should have been dated

SORRY LARRY, but you are not this newspaper's choice for a city council seat in Farmington Hills — not at this time, anyway — even though your recent campaign brochure would indicate otherwise.

The pamphlet, issued last week, includes a gushing endorsement for incumbent Larry Lichtman with the distinctive Farmington Observer "flag" underneath.

Problem: There's no date or anything else to indicate when the rave was produced, perhaps leading readers to believe it was current.

Actually, the endorsement was written just before the 1989 Hills Council election. Observer endorsements for the 1991 election haven't been made yet.

OUR PHONES started ringing Friday after-

noon. Other candidates (and a couple of plain-old voters, as well) wanted to know why we were endorsing now with so much time (and so many candidate forums) left before the election is settled on Tuesday, Nov. 5.

Our endorsements of candidates in the 1991 Farmington Hills Council race will appear on Thursday, Oct. 31, the last Thursday before election day.

Lichtman, to his credit, has written a short letter to the editor admitting that the undated endorsement could be confusing and pointing out that he's not the paper's choice — right now.

His letter appears somewhere on this page or the facing one.

"I certainly did not intend to mislead anybody," he told the editor over the phone Monday.

Give us more 'waste' days

BUT I RUN a suburban household, you might be thinking, not a chemical waste or a nuclear waste dump. Why should I have to worry about hazardous materials?

Well, the next time you get a minute, check out that space under your sink, peer into those dark corners of your basement and stumble through the clutter of your garage. You just might come to a different conclusion.

If you're like many suburbanites, you'll have collected the usual complement of paint, motor oil, antifreeze, car and household batteries, drain and oven cleaners, gasoline mixtures, glue, strippers, pesticides and herbicides.

Yes, that stuff is hazardous to people and planets, so please don't pour it down the drain or cram it into garbage bags that end up in the landfills — and eventually back in the land or air. So what to do with it?

IF YOU LIVE in Farmington or Farmington Hills, you get lucky at least twice a year — spring and fall — when technicians from Chemical Waste Management set up shop behind the courthouse to collect your household hazardous wastes and dispose of it properly.

The company's autumn showing last Saturday was well-attended, according to reports. Workers, some dressed in protective "moon suits," collected tons and tons of the crud from hundreds of residents, who didn't even have to get out of their cars.

Hazardous disposal days are great, and we're happy they're so well-attended. It's our thinking that there should be more of them (wouldn't once a month be great?), but we understand it's very expensive.

Anyway, expansion of the program is something officials of both cities should consider.

Hands off!

Prosecutor wrong on obscenity

LET'S MAKE A deal: We won't play cops if the cops won't play with our right as mature adults to make judgments based on our own values.

One man — the Wayne County prosecutor — has no right to rule on what is obscene for the general public.

An Oct. 2 raid on a video warehouse in Livonia is proof. At least four agencies were involved in the raid in which officers converged on General Video for 1½ days.

What the officers found were thousands of adult magazines and videos.

The material was initially ruled obscene and then impounded while awaiting destruction.

DESPITE THE huge amount of material involved and the large number of police officers who participated in the raid, the owners of General Video have been charged only with misdemeanors.

That's a good tip that the scales between what the prosecutor believes is his right to judge obscene and the number of officers involved just don't balance.

If it's true that a few can tell the many what is good for them, the reverse also can be true. The public has a right to ask whether it was good for several community budgets to pay for an apparent excess of officers at the raid.

Don't mistake our criticism for support of pornography. Our residents have a right to be out-

raged by pornography, especially child pornography, for which there is no defense.

But our residents are the ones to decide what is obscene, what they will watch and what they will read.

For now the Wayne County prosecutor seems to think the privilege lies with him. He's wrong.

AND, YES, there is the issue of free speech and free press guaranteed under the first article of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution.

Defending it can be awkward, as the ACLU found when it recently supported the right of white supremacists to protest in downtown Detroit.

Most people were offended by the white supremacists, their remarks and their stands. The Constitution doesn't guarantee that we may live without being offended.

The ACLU, however, was defending everyone's right to free speech, unfettered by prior censorship. The issue is the same when it comes to the right to publish without censorship, a right that is threatened by raids such as the recent one in Livonia.

So it really isn't "adult material" that we're discussing. We're discussing an ordinary citizen's right to make decisions without the unasked-for guidance.

The Wayne County prosecutor needs to be told that we aren't too feeble-minded to make those decisions.

He staunchly defended state rights and personal liberties

ONE OF THE most outspoken critics of the original Constitution and an eloquent advocate of the Bill of Rights was Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts. In debating the necessity of the Second Amendment giving militia the power to arm themselves, some delegates responded that militia were worthless as military forces. Gerry replied, "What sir, is the use of a militia? It is to prevent the establishment of a standing army, the bane of liberty."

Gerry was very active in the 1787 Constitutional Convention, yet, when the time came for signing the Constitution, Gerry refused — one of

only three delegates to do so. Gerry felt the Constitution had two serious deficiencies: It lacked a bill of rights to secure the liberties of the citizens, and the central government possessed too much military power.

Today, Gerry is remembered for backing a congressional redistricting technique to keep his party in power, the "gerrymander." Early Americans remember him, however, as a staunch defender of states' rights and personal liberties. John Adams once wrote of him: "If every man here was a Gerry, the liberties of America would be safe against the Gates of Earth and Hell."



HICKINS



Our arrogant leaders forget public's needs

WE ARE NOT governed by citizen-politicians who take time out of their careers and family responsibilities for a spell of public service.

We are governed by a separate political class, people whose life work is winning and holding elective office.

I have been making this point for years. And so the events of the past week failed to take me by surprise, other than to demonstrate just how crass and arrogant our leaders have become.

We learned that many members of Congress — including Michigan Democrats John Dingell and Dale Kildee and Republican David Camp — used the House of Representatives' travel bank as a free check kiting agency.

We learned that dozens of Washington lawmakers had stifled the House dining room for more than \$100,000. And we learned that a daily function of the House sergeant-at-arms has been to fix local parking tickets.

When a separate political class governs other mere citizens, you can expect this kind of nonsense. A New York Times poll found that the American people regarded members of Congress as "corrupt, pampered by unnecessary perquisites and arrogant about their power."

THE SAME can be said for our leaders closer to home in Lansing: the Michigan House, Senate and members of the office of Gov. John Engler.

As they knocked 53,000 poor and jobless Michiganders off the welfare rolls and into a struggle with survival, our political masters were cooking up a quiet little deal to feather their own nests.

In the final conference committee meeting on the general fund budget (closed to ordinary folks, of course, because we wouldn't understand), the House conferees proposed increasing the budget for both chambers by \$8.2 million. The Senate leadership gladly went along.

This increase comes to more than 10 percent, three times Michigan's inflation rate. It includes restoring a 9.2-percent cut, adds about \$1 million for each chamber for moving costs, and increases printing (to send you and me those timely and interesting newsletters), Social Security and retirement benefits!

Engler's staff went along for an extra \$125,000, plus \$18,000 that appears to have come from a simple multiplication error.

When asked about trying to have it both ways, Engler's chief of staff, Dan Ferro, replied that the governor's office was "badly overworked." I don't doubt it. I also imagine that most people cut off from General Assistance appreciate how overworked the governor's office is.

WHAT IS scandalous is that the decision to pour money into the already cushy jobs was taken in silent readiness. Both Republicans and Democrats went along. Class solidarity among our political masters



Philip Power

surpasses partisanship any day.

The only person on the inside of these dealings who's beened was Dick Young, a sensible Democratic House member from Dearborn Heights. "I don't want to look like a flaming hero, but I warned them that increasing their budgets at this time didn't make a heck of a lot of sense," Young said. "When the Wayne County morgue is filled up because of the way we're cutting the budget, we shouldn't try to go back to business as usual."

The deal gave the Department of Management and Budget, run by Engler's chief budget cutter, Patricia Woodworth, an extra \$950,000.

I suspect Woodworth got the check just about the same time she signed the letter threatening the Detroit Institute of Arts with complete elimination of state support if they didn't quit beefing about their cuts.

Just like the man says, "There that has, gets."

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

We shouldn't trust Bell

MONEY, MONEY, money.

Michigan Bell, which used to be the telephone company, has money coming in from every direction these days. And it wants even more.

The state's population has been stagnant for a decade, but Bell hasn't heard the bad news. In four years, its number of customer lines has increased 2.5, 2.6 and 2.2 percent. Has anyone else's customer base grown 9.7 percent in four years?

How? Spot the homes with teenagers and sell them a second phone line (so they can get ripped off by those 900 numbers). Sell more lines to businesses.

Our economic pic may not be growing, but Bell is widening its slice.

IF YOU THINK Bell is a great place to look for a job, think again. In 1989 it cut 600 jobs, in 1990 it whacked 900 more and this year will slice 200 jobs — a 1,700 lost job, or more than one-tenth of its current 16,000 work force.

How's that for a money-making machine in tough times? Last week Bell began offering a credit card. The boldface print trumpets interest rates as low as 16.8 percent. The tiny print on the back, however, says the interest rate on the first \$999 is 19.8 percent — plus a 50-cent "handling fee."

Already got a credit card? Shucks, says Bell, use our card "to pay off



Tim Richard

balances on more expensive cards." How's that for attacking the old American virtue of thrift?

NOWADAYS, only 90 percent of Bell's revenue comes from "communications services." The rest comes from "billing and collection services, rents and directory advertising."

Those yellow pages have so much advertising that they're unwieldy. The business is so huge that it's organized as a separate subsidiary, Ameritech Services Inc.

If you want to find the price of anything, however, tough luck, Mr. and Ms. Consumer. Bell's pal doesn't run price advertising.

Michigan Bell is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ameritech, one of seven regional companies created after the 1984 breakup of the AT&T Goliath. But that's not stopping Ameritech, which last year joined Bell Atlantic to acquire New Zealand's state-owned telecommunications company. Money, money, money, from the far corners of the globe.

It's all in the Bell's IRS report, a difficult document to obtain if you look in the Ameritech directory.

WITH SO MUCH money coming in and so many workers going out during such bad times, you'd think Bell would lie low in fear of a backlash.

Bell is more aggressive than ever, launching a vehement attack on the state's "nearly 80 years old" telecommunications law. Bell wants to invade even more industries — cable TV, fiber optics, two-way video, services for the hearing impaired, and so on.

Like the beat-beat-beat of a tomtom, Bell's fleet of lobbyists chants "competition, competition, competition."

Why? Don't we have several giant cable TV companies? Don't we have plenty of competition in all the fields?

The real danger is that Bell, as a near monopoly, might misuse its current protected position. It could use phone workers to install other telecommunications equipment, then hide the latter costs in the telephone end of the business, undercutting the competition.

The bill's sponsor, state Sen. Mat Dunakiss, R-Lake Orion, assures us the bill would "strictly prohibit cross-subsidization."

We shouldn't trust Bell. And we can't trust the state to regulate Bell's cost accountants.

Money, money, money — and more of it for Bell.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and federal news.

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