

Opinion

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16A(F) O&E Thursday, April 23, 1992

Broomfield's out! But voters need the battle

WHAT A RACE it would have been: U.S. Rep. William Broomfield, the entrenched Washington insider with a war chest that's the envy of all Capitol Hill, versus David Honigman, the equally moneyed state senator with a younger man's ideas and a cap set for higher office.

The plot could have been hatched in Hollywood. The Republican primary campaign would be a drawn-out version of that classic movie where Edward G. Robinson, the aging champion of the gamblers, takes on Steve McQueen, the upstart kid, in an all-night poker game.

If memory serves, Edward G. won that match. But William S. isn't going to win this one.

That's because Broomfield — the longest-serving Republican in the United States House of Representatives — has figuratively picked up his chips and walked away from the poker table with the announcement of his retirement Tuesday.

The 69-year-old Broomfield is bowing out after 36 years (that's 18 campaigns) in office, seemingly making it much easier for Honigman, 36, of West Bloomfield Township, to win the GOP primary and then skate smoothly into Congress from the heavily Republican 11th District, just formed through redistricting.

IT'S TOO BAD the big battle is off. Candidates and voters alike would have benefited from that kind of old-fashioned political shootout with the principals taking their cases directly to the people.

Issues and answers and the candidates showing us their Moxie (or lack of it) — that's what the political process is all about. Broomfield hasn't had to fend off a real political heavyweight in a long time. He should have. He'd be better off for it, and so would we.

Yes, Broomfield is hard-working, dedicated and honest. We note that he was not involved in the recent House banking scandal in which members bounced thousands of rubber checks. He is a congressman who is truly fiscally responsible.

And, yes, we have consistently endorsed his reelection over the years.

But, as we've told Broomfield in past elections, his voting record doesn't always reflect what we think many of his Oakland County constituents believe. Oakland County has changed since the mid-1950s, when Broomfield first took office and Honigman was born.

The area is more ethnically diverse. We have more families where both parents work or a single parent heads the family.

And now the new 11th District includes all of Redford and a hefty chunk of Livonia.

BROOMFIELD in the past has been against cutting the defense budget. He voted no consistently as Congress sought to resolve the budget crisis because he said he felt spending should have been frozen without raising taxes.

He voted against raising the minimum wage and against the child care bill to help parents of limited means obtain day care for their children. He has voted against federal funding of abortions, except in cases where the mother's life is endangered or rape or incest.

Many in the district agree with Broomfield on these issues. Still, we've always thought that he should have been more open to alternative ideas.

It's no secret that Broomfield doesn't care much for Honigman, who now has to be considered the GOP favorite. In fact, the congressman is rumored to be giving his congressional blessing to Joseph Knollenberg, a Bloomfield Township resident and former GOP county chairman.

This Knollenberg may give Honigman a fight in the primary. We hope so. Honigman needs the challenge. He needs to show us on a broader basis the political stuff of which he's made.

We'd hate to see him get an easy ride to the top of Capitol Hill. Then, perhaps the whole cycle would start all over again.

Broomfield has picked up his chips and walked away from the poker table.

Privacy

'Thought police' defy rights

English common law's strong stand on the sanctity of privacy was summed up by the phrase "the rain may enter, the wind may enter, but the king may not enter" a person's house. While other centers of privacy — one's imagination and thought process — always fell into that category, now is the time to spell that out for our legislators.

Legislators are bordering on the "thought police" job classification lately, proposing bills and resolutions that on the surface seem harmless but in reality lead all to the slippery slope of losing very basic rights. The right to read and watch all non-obscene material again is threatened.

Government's invasion into the thought process is something anyone who reveres civil liberties will find distasteful. Content regulation — making laws against what is said or printed — is something that is particularly odious in First Amendment law. Content regulation would allow government to pick and choose which messages the people get, and that power is dangerous.

A government that says Jews are evil can — and did — wipe a number of them off the face of the earth. A government that says "Satanic Verses" is evil can force a prominent author into hiding, fearing for his life.

THOSE WHO say it can't happen here aren't paying attention. In addition to the self-righteous groups trying to ban books from libraries and schools, there are also the self-righteous legislators who somehow know which messages in literature and art are to receive and which we aren't. Where that divine authority comes from, one only wonders.

The latest assaults include:

- State Sen. Michael Botchard, R-Birmingham, introduced a resolution to ban the sale of trading cards featuring the pictures of mass murderers.
- The U.S. Congress is working on a bill that would penalize authors and publishers if plots of books, movies, etc. are used in violent crimes against individuals.
- Statewide, there are school districts that work toward restricting what high school newspapers can cover, giving students a skewed view of the rule of government versus free press.
- The trading cards are a fact, to be sure. But a ban is an overreaction at best and sets a very bad precedent. The self-appointed thought police won't stop at trading cards, if they can get away with that.
- Holding authors criminally responsible if crazies copy their plots is one way to stop the flow of

contemporary literature. Authors, rather than serious governing legislators, might decide against introducing new plot twists or story lines.

WOULD MARGARET MITCHELL include the burning of Atlanta in "Gone With The Wind," if she had to worry that some future firebug would set a town ablaze? The Bible has Cain killing his brother Abel — how many families could see the authors on that one? It's ludicrous.

The thinking that one person is responsible for another person's action goes against current Constitutional decisions. The use of "fighting words" isn't admissible in an assault case because, the courts have ruled, a person is responsible for his or her own actions. An individual can choose to walk away.

An individual can choose not only to walk away from a fight, but always away from print or video messages that either don't present a belief system they embrace or use an entertainment vehicle that the individual doesn't think is amusing or interesting.

There are sufficient legal safeguards in place that protect people from untruths and obscene materials. Legislators need not be concerned with their constituents getting flies in the guise of truth because of existing defamation laws. And obscene materials — though they must meet a First Amendment test that proves they have no literary merit — are not protected at all by the First Amendment.

If materials contribute to the marketplace of ideas, concern self-government and contribute to individual self-fulfillment and self-realization, the U.S. Supreme Court has said the materials receive the full protection of the Constitution. The guidelines are broad, giving people a wealth of fiction and non-fiction from which to choose. As it should be.

A NATURAL curiosity should make a person ask what message is so dangerous that legislators want to keep it from the common person. Keeping an idea from a reader or movie-goer will not make that idea suddenly disappear, though perhaps that is the intent of the well-intentioned legislators.

It is every reader's and movie watcher's responsibility to let legislators know that we don't need any help in selecting material. Legislators should keep their sights on providing a free environment that recognizes the right of its citizens to gather information in whatever form and make its own opinions. Government acting as censors is a role no one needs.



Eliminate state Senate to improve government

WE ARE very badly governed. Most folks I talk with agree with this simple proposition, for the evidence is overwhelming. Three examples:

- Nationally, we cannot get our fiscal affairs in order. Despite annual ritualistic claims of good intentions from both president and Congress, this year's deficit will be near \$400 billion — a record. In Michigan, neither governor nor Legislature has had the guts to tackle the structural annual deficit of nearly \$500 million.
- We spend twice as much of the national income on health care as the next nearest nation, yet nearly 35 million Americans are without health insurance while the president and Congress continue to argue about how to reform the system.
- Michigan's schools are plainly failing to educate the workers of tomorrow, yet the governor and Legislature cannot agree on how best to tax to support schools, let alone define and measure what children should learn.

WHY IS this so? There are lots of reasons, but one reason is so basic and so simple that it often escapes notice: divided government.

When the president is a Republican and the Congress is Democratic — as has been the case in 16 out of the past 20 years — there is no device in the American political system to make them agree on coherent policy.

HOW IS this possible? Uniquely among the world's democracies, the U.S. Constitution requires separation of powers, dividing our government between executive, legislative and judicial branches. We elect a president to head the executive branch and, separately, the Congress. The Constitution says nothing about how they are to work together.

But as to the form government should take among the states, the Constitution says only, "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican form of government." (Art. IV, Sec. 4)

So Michigan, for example, could adopt any form of government it wants so long as it is "republican" — i.e., democratically elected.

In Michigan, when the governor is of one party and at least one chamber of the Legislature is controlled by another — as has been the case in 19 of the past 20 years — there is no way to get them to come together and get something done.

Divided government, most often, is the basis for gridlocked government. The president wants X, Congress wants Y, they lock horns and nothing gets done.

To put it less delicately, divided government often produces constipated government.

Remarkably, voters appear to prefer a government politically divided against itself rather than a government united to take action.

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



Therefore, my simple proposal:

Amend the Michigan Constitution to eliminate the state Senate and to require that the governor be the majority leader of the party that controls the state House of Representatives.

Result: a governor with, by definition, the votes in the Legislature to enact his or her program for Michigan.

No more gridlock. No more shirking responsibility for bad government by pointing the finger at the other party. No more evasion of political responsibility.

Would this be easy? No. Nothing serious ever is.

Is it possible? Yes. All that needs to be done is to amend the Michigan Constitution.

Think about it. Then think about just how badly we are governed. Then think again.

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from our readers

Here's to the strikers

To the editor:

As for the Kroger strike, thumbs up to the employees and thumbs down to management and the April 16 editorial in the Farmington Observer.

I am a former Chatham and Great Scott employee. I spent almost 10 years at Chatham at the 11 Mile and Middlebelt store.

Grocery work is not easy work. In fact, thanks to the management, it can be quite stressful at times. Ever since I can recall, buggers have always gotten the shaft at any store. They have always been ignored, yet they have many jobs to do. They are treated like dirt by management. They are not only students. They are housewives, adult men, and any number of people trying to earn a decent living. And no. They are not trying to get manions nor are the cashiers.

Cashiers are also under a lot of stress. It isn't easy dealing with customers. They, like the buggers, are under a lot of stress from screaming customers and screaming management.

When I quit Chatham it was because of management. Management abuses their power over employees. They help to create many of the problems that employees get. Some people that are on the cash register don't belong there, yet management will torture that person by doing it. Management can be very cruel at times.

Are the striking employees asking for too much? No, just their fair share for the amount of work they slave over all day just to please the management. And that's not wrong. Here's to them.

Mark C. Kielbasa, Farmington Hills

How reader sees election

To the editor:

Lately I think your focus has changed for the better. However, your editorial on school board candidates (April 9) makes me wonder.

First, there are many ways to serve this District other than serving on the board. And if the town hall meetings are an indicator, tough times are not scaring people away. They are taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity to help the

district balance needs with resources.

Second, what's the problem? The composition of the school board is going to change dramatically in the next few years. The challenges to the board will be numerous and difficult. An orderly transition with experienced and seasoned perspectives guiding new board members is essential to this district to avoid losing our way.

A PROVEN commitment to education and direct ties to the State and Nation in the educational arena is vital to a district and imperative to avoid an inactional board.

For these and many other reasons, Helen Prutov is a valued member of our school board. Therefore, for many of us who are involved in this district, there is only one opening for the board this year and there are two clearly distinct choices.

They are: Joe Svoke, who has demonstrated the desire and capacity to work constructively with the board and the administration, and another candidate, who stays on the sidelines poisoning his ideas with antagonism.

Helen Prutov and Joe Svoke offer this to the Community. Two positions, two quality choices. What's the problem?

David L. York, Farmington Hills

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