

Powerless again! More storms, more outrage

Somebody please light a candle. Tuesday was the first anniversary of the Great Power Outage of 1991. Actually, quite a few candles were burning in the Farmington area and other parts of Oakland County a couple of weeks before the anniversary date, as a brief and violent thunderstorm once again left thousands without power.

Yes, it's getting to be a familiar story around here: The winds blow, the wires come down and thousands suffer in the dark.

And then people complain long and loud about Detroit Edison, virtually the only provider of electric power in metropolitan Detroit.

People around here still remember the Great Outage of '91. For a week or more, thousands of Farmington-area residents — Edison customers by decree — came to realize the importance of electricity in their lives. They didn't have any.

While they were waiting for the lights to come back on, they could busy themselves with pleasant little domestic chores — like throwing away thousands of dollars worth of spoiled food from freezers and refrigerators.

Kicking Detroit Edison is in vogue following a power outage. We know we've had sharp editorial words for the utility in the past.

While we sympathize with the powerless peo-

ple, we also realize that power interruptions are the ultimate public relations disaster for Edison, whose officials must tremble at the sight of a dark cloud or the sound of a radio weather report with the word "thunderstorm" in it.

Still, we must repeat what we've written before in this space: There are better ways for our utilities to cope with the vagaries of Michigan weather.

A much better way would be to put the utility lines (electric, cable TV, telephone, gas) underground so that wind and windblown objects won't knock them down. To us, that just isn't a complicated concept.

Edison and other wire-stringers should use their profits to bury their lines, not just in the swanky new subdivisions, but in older areas, too. Going underground would surely improve service.

And something else we've said before also bears repeating. Edison seems to have a virtual monopoly on Detroit-area power. Don't look for any good reason why. It's always been that way.

There might be fewer power outages, we think, if there were several competing providers of electricity.

Oh well, here's to sunny days, gentle rains . . . and utilities with sound plans to improve their standard of service.

Ruling becomes voters' burden

The right to choose is dangling by a thread. A 5-4 Supreme Court decision has left women with the right to an abortion, though states can impose a myriad of restrictions as long as it doesn't present an "undue burden."

While the ruling is nebulous, the future is clear: States will pass one restriction after another and then pro-choice proponents will make challenges in the courts.

Even more dangerous is that two Supreme Court justices voting on the choice side (Henry Blackmun and John Paul Stevens) are both past 70. Chances are, the person who is president in January 1993 will most likely appoint at least one Supreme Court justice.

For those who want to see the Supreme Court keep abortion as a legal option, the answer is to vote for a pro-choice presidential candidate.

Legislatively, federal representatives and senators can circumvent any future erosion of abortion rights by enacting the Freedom of Choice act. The act would restrict states' ability to set limitations more so than the current Supreme Court test allows.

States don't have to restrict abortions, and Michigan's Legislature shouldn't.

Individuals who feel strongly that a right to privacy in matters relating to reproduction should not only tell their friends how they feel but should also let the candidates know during the campaign. Then use pro-choice as one of the deciding factors when casting ballots in the August and November elections.

Already one group has emerged to support candidates who are clearly pro-choice. Women in Politics, a loosely-organized bipartisan coalition of pro-choice Oakland County women, is recruiting pro-choice voters to actively campaign for candidates of their ilk. It's more than lip service, it's sending out letters and knocking on doors. It's also giving financial support.

No one should doubt that individuals who are pro-life will use the same methods to get candidates elected who mirror their beliefs.

While the heat is off the Supreme Court for the moment, the temperature should rise in state and federal campaigns. Candidates are abundant this summer. They're out looking for supporters. Don't allow a candidate to waffle on this issue — or any issue. Ask direct questions and don't settle for less than a direct answer.

Too many issues of individual rights are at stake, and sound bites and slick campaign literature aren't going to change that. It's time for candidates and voters to stand up and be counted.

There is no shame in telling either voters or candidates that a person favors having a choice, which is not the same as being pro-abortion. It should be up to the woman to decide her fate, without having governmental interference in possible options.

Pro-choice voters have to speak up or the freedom to choose will disappear right along with the confetti swept from floors of election night celebrations this November.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Petition drive on hold

In case you haven't heard, the K.I.D.S. petition drive has been put on "hold" — temporarily. K.I.D.S. (Knowledge Is Democracy's Safeguard) is a grassroots organization seeking to amend Michigan's constitution with language calling for "equal educational opportunity" for all the children in the state of Michigan.

The bad news is that an insufficient number of signatures was collected to place this matter before the voters in November 1992. The good news is that more than 1,500 people circulated petitions statewide, in nearly every county and in more than 160 school districts. Endorsements came from the media (TV and newspapers), political and labor organizations and individuals who saw glaring inequities in the way we fund our public schools (primarily through property taxes).

Our legislators can "pick up the ball" and thoughtfully create real reform in the way we finance our schools. Band-Aid approaches will not carry us into the 21st century.

I was a volunteer in the K.I.D.S. campaign, and will continue to monitor and study this

problem. I would like to thank all the caring people who circulated and signed petitions. The challenge for financial reform is still with us.

I encourage all to stay informed of our state's financial decisions concerning public education and pay very close attention to how these decisions affect your local school district. Our children are worth it.

If real reform in public school funding has not been accomplished in two years, the K.I.D.S. campaign will revive (with more people and more determination than ever), and we will lay the foundation — set the goal — in our state constitution for "equal educational opportunity" for all children in our state.

Karen L. Taylor, Ypsilanti

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

MEA losing leadership clout

Question: A few weeks ago, you wrote that the MEA leadership can't expect teacher raises of 7 percent (or more) next year.

We have worked for years to get salaries, working conditions and fringe benefits to a decent level. What do you see happening?

Answer: Bluntly, I believe the MEA, the strongest and most powerful union in the state, may soon become an artifact in the Smithsonian Institution. That's a bold statement, not an angry one, inasmuch as I was one of a group of teacher union presidents who fought for the right to negotiate in the mid-60s.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt in my mind that the MEA is a target in Gov. Engler's commitment to fiscal solvency.

Look at the facts! Unions, teachers' or otherwise, are losing the battle at an alarming rate, i.e. the air controllers, Caterpillar, Krogers, GM's Willow Run plant.

Shifting money from the wealthy district to poorer districts (the Robin Hood Act) does not generate citizen support for school tax increases in the wealthy (out-of-formula) districts. Dumping FICA payments onto the local districts and freezing property taxes is all money that went into teacher salary agreements in the past. Not anymore. That money is gone.

Let's look at an example, the Plymouth Canton district in which I was once president of the teacher organization.

In two years, that district lost a total of about \$6.8 million from the property tax freeze, the Robin Hood Act, state FICA cuts and entitlement money for such items as transportation and vocational education. That translates into a loss of 56.5 positions so far. This scenario is being played out in other Observer & Eccentric communities as well as outstate.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. If Engler's "cut and cap" plan is approved by voters in November, property tax assessments will be rolled back by 30 percent over three years and assessments will be capped at 3 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less. That translates into less money for books, salaries and fringe benefits.

The 7 percent raise received by teachers in many districts is only for those at the top of the



DOC DOYLE

salary schedule. All others receive an additional 3 to 5 percent raise as they move up each rung in what some cases can be a 12-step schedule. Add on fringe benefit increases, and the actual total is about 12 to 13 percent a year, or approximately 37 percent over the life of a three year contract.

Educators have been getting good raises for the last 20-plus years, and I believe they have deserved the raises. But there is only one source for money, and that is to lay off even more teachers and administrators and increase class sizes.

If Engler's "cut and cap" measure is approved in November, I envision:

- Few teacher strikes, more districts working without a settled contract. As one board member told me, "They can walk 'til they wear their shoes out. There is no money."

- The great, committed teachers will still be doing a great job.

- The angry teachers will still be angry.

- There will be more buyouts, more teachers getting out.

- Many teachers will start asking for what we are paying \$400 to \$500 in MEA annual dues.

The MEA has done an outstanding job for Michigan teachers, and I am proud to have been part of that effort. But if Engler's "cut and cap" bill passes, the MEA, as it is presently structured, will have lost much of its power.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Do you plan to attend Farmington Founders Festival activities? Which ones?

We asked this question at the Crossroads Shopping Center at Nine Mile and Farmington.



"Yes we do. We go to the crafts booths and try to get to some of the stores."

George Tornoff
Farmington



"It's my favorite. Our main goal is to get to the beer tent, Bingo is a must, and then all the sales. We start Thursday night. It's sheer madness."

Bridget Moloney
Farmington



"I ride my bike there. I go to all the craft things. Then it's bratwurst and gyros at Dagwood's, the Dress Barn, the shoe outlet, the On Road and the beer tent. . . ."

Colleen Schneider



"I ride up every year. I just go up there and walk through and see if there's anything I like."

Matt Patton
Farmington

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