

POINTS OF VIEW

# Perot rode in on a mood of national discontent

**E**arly in 1990, at the height of a demagogue-dominated mob effort to suppress my egalitarian ideas and get me fired from the Rochester schools' assistant superintendency, I was quoted in an Observer & Eccentric newspaper as follows:

"Thank God our children are growing up in a democracy where no demagogue can legally close their door to free speech and critical inquiry. So . . . let's not voluntarily close that door on . . . their teachers and educational leaders with our own hands."

"If through ignorance and fear we do that, it's only a matter of time before a dictator does ride into national office, because our electorate will be too unschooled to understand what they'll be losing if they don't oppose him, and they'll become a non-electorate almost overnight . . ."

Two years later came Ross Perot, the most dangerous demagogue to emerge in a democratic country since the days of Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy, or

maybe even the days following the fall of Germany's Weimar Republic.

He was a candidate who spied on people, cloaked himself in the trappings of militarism, paid for his own monumental campaign — meant to further enrich the super-rich by cutting the capital gains tax and wanted the Constitution changed so as president he could veto any appropriation passed by Congress that he didn't favor.

Even though perhaps he didn't realize it, he frighteningly resembled a presidential candidate for an autocracy rather than for a constitutional democracy.

Making Perot's candidacy even scarier was the fact that he rode in during an era of national discontent with an elitist Republican president who is sadly out of touch with the needs of ordinary Americans.

And while that president's Democratic challenger offers a progressive platform, he wasn't promptly forthright in responding to an allegation of phi-



JOHN TELFORD

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landering. In the end, his initial hesitancy in responding to that allegation still could cost Bill Clinton the presidency — even though it shouldn't.

If their now well-documented womanizing had prevented the election of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jack Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, the United States would have suffered immeasurably.

I only wish that right off the bat Clinton had said of his accuser, "If she says we did it, I guess you'll have to draw whatever conclusions you wish. I'm too much a gentleman to contradict a lady. Now let's get back to the real issues regarding America's needs. Next question!"

Regrettably, he didn't say that — and although the topic has faded somewhat, count on the trailing Bush campaign to revive it now with a vengeance. Given the shortcomings of both Bush and Perot, such a revival could have proved doubly damaging had Perot re-

mained visibly in the race.

While Perot would have diluted Bush's votes, I doubt he'd have taken enough from Clinton to win. That is, he probably wouldn't have unless — God forbid — our schools failed to educate a majority of voting Americans to recognize the traits of an autocrat.

Now that Perot has maneuvered himself safely out of contention, I'm even more confident that we'll choose the progressive, young Democrat rather than vote again for the Republican who's been sitting in the White House for four years — and who never did stand for much there except elitism.

*John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district. He has been controversial for his programs involving diverse religions and alternative history courses.*

# Empowerment becomes a useful tool for change

**T**he word empowerment probably first saw print at a university. It probably expressed a good idea: Make people responsible for themselves. But responsibility is a Republican word and the good liberals at the colleges wouldn't be caught with that word in their master's thesis. So the word was empowerment.

The idea behind it is that some homeless who will turn his life around once he learns he has been empowered. He'll drop that bottle of Wild Irish Rose, finish his master's degree in fine arts and open a gallery.

We all know that's about as likely as George Bush becoming head of the American Civil Liberties Union.

But empowerment lives. However, some are seeing through it. The Detroit teachers know what it means, responsibility for what they do. And of course

they don't want any of that.

Being a go-with-the-flow type of guy, I'm warming up to empowerment. I even tried it at home.

I've empowered my wife to cook, my son to walk the dog and take out the trash and my oldest son to pay for college. And meeting with some success, I'm convinced other segments of society can be empowered.

Here's my list:

- Parents of children who eat lead paint and get brain damage will be empowered to feed their children so they don't eat the paint.
- Parents will be empowered to make sure their children go to school or learn a trade instead of dumping them on the welfare rolls.
- Drug addicts and anybody else who is addicted to something will be empowered so they can't blame any-



JEFF COUNTS

body else for their plight. This could have a disastrous effect on daytime television talk shows. There wouldn't be anybody to put on them. For that reason, all talk show hosts should be empowered so they can find another way to make a living.

- Anybody who listens to Rush

Limbaugh should be empowered so they can learn how to think for themselves.

- Bill Clinton . . . so he will stop grinning all the time and say something forceful.
- All Republicans . . . so they will stop blaming poor people for being poor.
- Gays and lesbians . . . so they will stop blaming the rest of the world for their plight.
- Vegetarians . . . so they will have enough energy to drive to the store and buy a steak.
- All politicians . . . so they will stop blaming their opponents and take a look at themselves. As one local wag put it when talking about a candidate: "He has a formidable opponent, himself."
- All children . . . so they don't

blame their parents for everything. As my wife says, "the statue of limitations should be up" when it comes to blaming mom or dad.

- Gun nuts . . . so they will feel secure enough to live life without an AK-47 under the bed.

The list is endless, the word empowerment complex, but the whole thing is really pretty simple. It's time to quit whining, get off the couch and take out the trash.

And just think of it, our mothers and fathers knew what empowerment was when they asked us to clean our rooms when we were kids.

They just had a different name for it.

*Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers and has empowered himself so he can lose 20 pounds and quit smoking.*

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