

Farmington Observer OPINION

21898 FARMINGTON RD., FARMINGTON, MI 48336

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1992

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No photos!

Open court to the press

In case anyone hasn't noticed, there's a very active judicial race going on in the Farmington area.

The battle pits Marla (the almost-incumbent) Parker against Jack (the good old boy) McDonald for a seat on the bench of the 47th District Court in Farmington. The winner in the Nov. 3 general election will fill the position now occupied by retiring Judge Margaret Schaeffer.

Now, please understand, we meant no ill by our "almost-incumbent" and "good old boy" cracks. In our opinion, the community is fortunate to have these two fine people wanting to drink from the public trough.

However, Parker is already lapping there (she's a magistrate in the 47th District Court; my, doesn't she look judicial in that black robe!), and that seems to bother some people.

In an attempt to provide full coverage of the race, we decided to follow the candidates for a few hours during a typical day for photographs and a story. With Parker, that meant going to court — where she just happens to work.

Hold on there, not in my court, you don't, said Fred Harris, the other judge in the 47th District. Harris flatly refused to allow our photographer to snap Parker working as a magistrate.

"We checked with the state Bar (Association)," said Harris later, "and we found that, if it politicizes the court, it should be discouraged."

Pretty lame reason, we think. If it politicizes the precious court to show in words and photos what actually is (Marla Parker in a robe), so be it. In four years, Harris will be up for re-election. We just bet he makes no objection to us showing him at work on the bench.

Could it be that Fred Harris, by his actions, is letting us know who he favors in this election? That's what some people are saying.

Anyway, we're happy to note that good old McDonald seems to be taking this with good humor.

Parker's newspaper photo in a recent Observer story showed her in her magistrate's robe, it was noted in McDonald's newsletter. "We asked Jack if we could get a picture of him in a robe too, but, as luck would have it, all he could find was a bathrobe," the newsletter said.

"I did discover this picture of him 'on the bench' though, and decided to share it with all of you."

There was a photo of an unshaven guy in a bathrobe sitting on a park bench.

Lower premiums can benefit all

Adopting an insurer's plan to lower auto premiums isn't great public policy. But it's all Michigan drivers have.

Voting yes on Proposal D, the AAA-backed proposal, should help drive down runaway medical and legal costs that have become an integral part of Michigan's no-fault system.

It will also send a strong message to the state's elected officials, who have ducked controversial issues in recent years, including auto insurance reform efforts last spring.

Under no-fault, every Michigan driver is required by law to carry insurance. That makes car insurance more like a mandated tax than a matter of personal choice.

Proposal D will provide reasonable tax relief for an already overburdened public trying to make do with less real income and higher living costs.

Proposal D offers most western Wayne and Oakland County residents a trade-off: lower premiums in exchange for concessions on medical and other benefits. Unlimited medical expenses paid by insurance companies will be replaced by an adjustable cap that runs from \$250,000 to \$5 million.

AAA officials say those choosing the minimum coverage will see rate rollbacks averaging 20 percent from Nov. 1 levels. Those choosing the maximum will still save on premiums, but not as much, they say.

Opponents say insurance companies can jack up rates before Nov. 1 and then lower them. We don't see any evidence that this has happened or will in the next two weeks.

The coverage concessions outlined in Propo-

al D are reasonable and will put Michigan closer to the national norm. The proposed \$250,000 floor on medical benefits matches the maximum in nearly two dozen states; the \$5 million maximum is nearly five times higher than Pennsylvania's \$1.1 million cap, its closest competition.

Proposal D would also move the state closer to the no-fault concept as it was originally envisioned. Passage would prevent anyone judged more than 50 percent at fault in an accident from suing to collect damages, while still covering the at-fault driver's medical expenses.

Rapidly rising medical and legal costs are the spikes that have made sticker shock as much a part of buying auto insurance as in selecting a new or used car. Between 1985 and 1990, auto-related medical coverage costs have nearly doubled, increasing 91 percent. Auto-related legal bills skyrocketed 117 percent.

The Detroit consumer price index rose 23 percent during the same period.

Limiting payouts in those areas should lead to lower costs. Medical and legal expenses are subject to the same market forces as everything else.

Meanwhile, passage of Proposal D will put Lansing on notice. Insurance reform and property taxes are among issues Gov. John Engler and the Michigan Legislature ought to be dealing with rather than dumping them in voters' laps.

If Proposal D were defeated, it would mean officials can continue dropping the ball on critical issues without suffering any real consequences.

MARVIN TEEPLES



LETTERS

Be constructive

A healthy community provides its institutions with positive support and constructive criticism.

Claims that the Farmington School Board is abdicating its responsibility and is putting students at risk are neither positive nor constructive. The safety of our streets is our responsibility.

We share that responsibility with city government, the police, and the board. To hold the board of education responsible for the safety of a bus stop on Farmington streets is an abdication of our responsibility.

The community has said "no" to a bond issue and to two millage increases. The state has capped property assessments and has reneged on the payment of \$10 million each year to this district.

The failure of the community to support the millage request to replace the first \$5 million of State "recapture" led to budget cuts. Yes, \$1 million was cut from transportation. But the balance came from staff and programming.

Faced with a choice forced upon us by the state and by our community, I joined others in advising the school board to let parents should-

der more of the burden of transporting our children to school rather than cutting deeper into programming and staff.

I maintain that if a tornado picked up and destroyed every school bus in this district, initially parents would be scrambling, but each and every one of our children would manage to get to school and back home each and everyday of the year. We as parents would find a way to make it happen.

No one is going to "give" us safe streets. We have to be an active partner with the city and our neighbors to create and maintain safe streets. To expect it to happen for you and without your active involvement is unrealistic if not irresponsible.

Dave York, Farmington Hills

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.

Incumbents draw PAC money

Michigan's congressional delegation returned home last week after the 104th Congress came to its grumpy, increasingly partisan and largely inconclusive end.

Sunday's New York Times called it "the Gridlock Congress" and blamed its lackluster achievements on divided government, partisan wrangling between a Republican president and a Democratic House and Senate. The president vetoed legislation 36 times; he was overturned only once.

The anger felt by most Michigan folks found focus in two public embarrassments. The House cashed members' checks, regardless of whether there was money in the bank to cover them. And the Senate, populated by a bunch of old, white males, was unable to admit that women are often harassed in the workplace.

For most people here in Michigan — out of work, scared about job security, or just worried that the country is headed in the wrong direction — the overwhelming sense is that Congress is out of touch with the daily concerns of ordinary people.

This sense was heightened by last weekend's reports in The Detroit News of the overwhelming amount of political action committee (PAC) money going to congressional incumbents.

Now running at a record pace, PAC contributions to the 11 Michigan congressmen running for re-election totaled \$2.8 million as of the July contribution reports. The News estimates that around \$4 million will be donated before the election, where "much of the money comes from out-of-state interest groups with business pending before committees on which the congressmen sit."

Challengers are essentially shut out. U.S. Rep. Bill Ford, D-Ypsilanti, the powerful chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, reported \$282,950 in PAC money out of \$365,941 in total contributions as of July. His opponent, state Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, had raised just \$1,650 from PACs, out of a total \$37,650.

Running as an incumbent state senator two



PHILIP POWER

years ago, however, Geake collected \$67,000 from PACs. That's conclusive evidence of what really interests PACs. Who cares about principle when there's serious access to incumbent legislators to be bought?

The pattern is about the same for other Michigan members. U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Southfield, picked up just under half of his total of \$834,091 from PACs. U.S. Rep. Bob Carr, D-East Lansing, took a little more than half of his total from PACs.

I believe that one reason President George Bush is trailing so badly in the polls is that he has been inside the "presidential bubble" so long that he had no idea how many people were in so much economic trouble. "Too many limousines for too many years" was how Molly Ivins, a Texas columnist, put it.

In Washington, congressmen are surrounded by staff, by lobbyists, by special interest pleaders, by sycophants. PACs fund their re-election campaigns, based not on philosophical stands, but on the utility of incumbency.

As I have argued before, as long as members consider the quest for office as acts of their professional career rather than an interlude of public service, the question continues to arise: Are our representatives in Congress more interested in special interest PAC money than in the overriding concerns of folks back home?

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION: What's your favorite TV program?

We asked this question at the Farmington Hills Senior Center swimming pool.



"Outdoor stuff on Channel 56... stuff on exploring and things like that."
Paul Fairbrother
Farmington Hills



"Wheel of Fortune" because it's short... and clean."
Dorothy Gatchell
Bloomfield Hills



"ESPN because it has all the sports."
John Muir
Farmington Hills



"I like 'Cheers' and 'Golden Palace.'"
Pearl Moss
Southfield

The Farmington Observer

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