

POINTS OF VIEW

It takes lots of drive to get to work each day

Some spring mornings the sun is a big orange ball in my rearview mirror as I speed west on I-696. Other mornings the sky is sort of a putrid gray that pretty much matches the pavement and the concrete walls looming up from the sides of the freeway.

Tuesday morning was definitely one of the latter. It was a dreary drive and it ended at the beginning of a long day. Every working day I drive the I-696. Destination: Farmington Road and Nine Mile in Farmington's "panhandle."

What is there to see? What is there to think about as "Morning Edition" headlines are murmured over the car radio? Oh, plenty.

First of all, let's please do away with this notion that there's nothing to see on the superhighway. There's a lot to see if you'll just look.

You'll notice, for example, a definite end to Southfield and a beginning to

Farmington Hills. Just look at the height of the buildings: Southfield sprouts, Farmington Hills sprawls.

The mileage sign just before Inkster Road ("Brighton 26, Lansing 74") gives me a certain leaving-town feeling... now that I'm in Farmington, am I still in metro Detroit?

One very strange thing about this stretch of freeway. There's only one exit — No. 5 at Orchard Lake Road — between Telegraph Road in Southfield and the I-275 interchange in western Farmington Hills. That's about seven miles.

Compare this to the much newer part of I-696 to the east. There are on-off ramps at every major road: Lahser, Evergreen, Southfield Road, Greenfield, Coolidge, etc.

What good is a freeway that you can't enter or leave? Maybe this is how they wanted it 25 years ago when this part of the freeway was built. Was the message: Just keep on driving, friend? Anyway, Exit 5 is well-used, being



TOM BAER

the only one for seven miles of busy freeway. The exit ramp starts as one lane and widens to four before its spews its traffic onto busy Orchard Lake Road.

Most cars turn north toward northern Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield. Relatively few head south. But I do.

Hint: A good way to get to Farmington Road (where there's no freeway ramp, remember?) is to jog south on Orchard Lake and then turn right on

Oakland Drive, which goes through the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College.

This little road has become almost a service drive for the freeway. It used to be one of the community's best-kept secrets, but now it's been discovered as an easy way to avoid traffic-clogged 12 Mile Road or that no-way-on freeway.

Oakland Drive ends at Farmington Road where a curious traffic signal does little to control traffic. During morning rush hour, it just blinks red for Oakland Drive, yellow-yellow for busy Farmington Road. Sometimes the cars really pile up along Oakland, and drivers take awful chances.

That light should be fully operational — and it is at 10:30 in the morning when there's not nearly as much traffic. Go figure.

I'm on Farmington Road now, headed south past Heritage Park and the Community Center. Look into the Community Center parking lot most mornings and you'll see two Farming-

ton Hills police cars, facing in opposite directions so the cops can talk to each other. Are they gunning like Melville's whaling ships?

Farmington Road, one of the area's more scenic two-lanes, goes steadily downhill until it hits 10 Mile and a steep downgrade begins. Most days I take the car out of gear and just coast down.

Over the years I've decided that it'll be a good day if I can coast all the way to Shiloh and halfway up the other hill without touching the brake. Mostly there's too much traffic, and there goes my good day.

Then it's time to go south again and zoom down Farmington Road — making the lights, hopefully, through the central business district and past Nine Mile. One difficult left turn later and I'm at work.

Tom Baer is the editor of The Farmington Observer. He may be reached by calling 477-5450.

Media pressure adds to hikers' survival skills

It's hard to know which hat to put on.

That's because the media were both the good guys and the bad guys in the efforts to get the Cranbrook-Kingswood hiking expedition safely out of the Great Smokies as the Storm of the Century fell about them.

As Cranbrook officials told students and parents gathered Wednesday to welcome the sophomores back, the fact that the whole world was watching through the barrage of coverage kept the pressure on search efforts.

And Cranbrook gave parents and students the green light to go ahead and do follow-up stories. "Anyone who feels comfortable helping the media, should," was the gist of the message.

By policy, Cranbrook-Kingswood, a private school that attracts students from other states and countries, has always been a citadel of silence in pre-texting students from the press. Even when we do a benign feature story on a school program, there's a list of students who can't be interviewed or pho-

tographed.

And of course this was major news. Although Cranbrook officials were cooperative in getting out the latest information on how many students had been rescued, names were never a part of that.

Guards were posted at every entrance and throughout the Bloomfield Hills campus. The press was headed into one building, and not allowed access to where parents were gathered for the latest information. A truck built on a mutual concern for the students' safety developed. And parents willing to talk to the press knew where to find them.

So, at the homecoming, the press by pre-arrangement was allowed to take photographs and describe the scene from afar, kept back from the yellow-taped area where students and parents were reunited. Even the embarrassing televised beating by one local anchorman to the on-the-scene reporter that she got closer ("Are you being physically restrained?") couldn't change that.



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Later, a press conference was held for families willing to be interviewed. No such truce developed in the Great Smokies.

Cranbrook officials asked students who had been rescued and were holed up at Holiday Inn in Cherokee, N.C., not to talk to the media, at least until everyone was safe. Again, they were carrying out an obligation to students and parents as well as keeping the flow of information coming from one source. But silence from the kids was in direct contrast to the job the media had

come to the foot of the Great Smokies to do. The competition for the story was tremendous. A lot of time and money had been spent to overcome the obstacles posed by weather and terrain.

Students, recovering from their own experience and worried about friends and in some cases family members, tell stories of being trapped in their rooms, of being followed into the motel's public restrooms. As the frustration built, some students moaned reporters.

Erica Kohler, a sophomore from Bloomfield Hills, said she's sorry that happened. "But we felt kind of violated. Like we were trapped (because of the media). I felt like I did when I was under the tarp with all that snow."

"I couldn't see my friends. I couldn't leave my room for the most part."

Ian O'Laughlin, a senior from Orchard Lake and co-leader of one group, hiked out of the mountains Sunday. But his sister and girlfriend were among the last to be rescued. For him, "the most difficult part of the expedition was the last four days that I spent

at the Holiday Inn."

"In the hotel, with no contact with the 80 people from Cranbrook in the mountains, the whole emotional strain of the situation was the most intense... that I have ever encountered in my life, and I'm sure that was the same for the others around us."

Under that kind of pressure, some students went too far. So did some media. But let's also remember who were the grown-ups here.

The students and parents who have shared their experiences with us have been amazing. Their poise, their willingness to meet our deadlines and their calls to say their stories were well told, have been gratifying.

Whatever hat we're wearing, it's off to them for not only surviving the ultimate wilderness expedition but the wild throng of media as well.

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Health conference offers no bromides for care crises



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ther's illness.

The information gathered was allegedly to help Ms. Clinton with her health care reform policies. To say that the meeting was disappointing would be kind.

The audience, which attended by invitation only, consisted of people who are involved in a variety of health care management. What we heard was nothing that we were not aware of and had not been aware of for years. Yes, there are problems with our health care policies; it is an inequitable system. All those who desperately need help paying medical costs do not get it. The problems are not new; the forum offered no solutions.

There is not enough medical care in our state's rural areas; physician and hospital costs are skyrocketing; home health care, thought to be an economical and viable alternative, does not work; and, to my dismay, health and long-term care for the elderly was not a subject to be addressed.

I find it very difficult to comprehend how the government can come up with a revitalized health-care system that is not fully concerned with older adults. People over 65 are the largest segment of our population and their numbers are going to continue to grow. While the symposium was concerned with children and preventive medicine, a lack of concern for the elderly was evident.

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Managed care is the new buzzword. I am not certain what that exactly means, but I have the distinct feeling that it is going to cost more and eliminate one of our dearest freedoms, that of choice. Managed care brings up the issue of choice. It implies that people could no longer select their own physician or hospital. It also seeks of specialized medicine. As our Canadian neighbors, who constantly cross our borders to seek medical care, can tell us, this doesn't work either.

In the United States, \$93 billion is spent yearly on health care. One out of every \$7 is spent on health care. Are there abuses of the system? Certainly. Are there easy solutions? No. Can Ms. Clinton's new reform proposals, which are due in May, solve the problem? I doubt it. There are 35 million Americans who have no health care insurance. Where will the funds come to provide care for them?

I have the distinct feeling that Ms. Clinton's health-care reform policy has already been written and that the forums are exercises in futility. Yes, everyone should have health care, but who will pay for it? I have a feeling it will be you and me.

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To leave a message for Mahler, from a touch-tone phone, call 953-2047, Ext. 1863.



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