

POINTS OF VIEW

Many fought for monument to shared horrors

It's hard to understand Rabbi Charles Rosenzweig. The rabbi and West Bloomfield's Holocaust Memorial Center are synonymous. He's fought for and maintained this monument of our horrific past so the Holocaust won't be repeated. Yet he believes the center should only tell of the horrors Jewish people suffered during World War II. Rosenzweig thinks widening the focus to include other groups, such as Polish people, homosexuals, the handicapped or gypsies, diminishes the impact of the Holocaust's message.

This issue came up because a Holocaust Center is about to open in Washington. That center is several times larger than West Bloomfield's memori-

al because it includes representations from groups Rosenzweig excludes. Unless I'm mistaken, a large part of the world came to the aid of all Holocaust victims. The event was called World War II. Allied Forces didn't draw distinctions between who should or shouldn't be defended against the Germans and Japanese. It's ironic Rosenzweig seems to be drawing a line where others didn't. Rosenzweig's view also seems contrary to mainstream Jewish thought. I've found most Jewish people and rabbis in particular — Sherwin Wine comes to mind — to be welcoming in all overtures. Passover is an excellent example of this. Our office received several letters telling us about Jewish-



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Christian Seder, Black-Jewish Seder, pretty much any combination a person could name. The point of the letters was to say everyone was welcome to celebrate Passover. The letters reminded me of efforts made by West Bloomfield's Chaldean and Jewish communities to better understand each other through cultural exchanges. And let's not forget that when Gov. John Engler tried to yank the funding for West Bloomfield's Holocaust Center, the community — not just part of it — saw the significance of the center and banded together to make Engler think otherwise. Had that not happened, the center's hours would have been severely re-

duced and many exhibits would have ceased to exist. State Sen. Dave Honigman led the charge, and it included members of many surrounding communities. Honigman didn't fight to save the center for Jewish people — he fought to save it for everyone. We cannot pick and choose the history we teach. It must be all-inclusive or it will not be accurate. Rabbi Rosenzweig might wish to reconsider his opinion, in light of these facts, and welcome all members of the community that worked so hard to welcome him. Philip Sherman is the editor of The West Bloomfield/Lakes Eccentric. His telephone number is 644-1100, Ext. 264.

Close meetings to select university presidents

Governance of Michigan's public universities, arguably our state's most valuable asset, is today largely stymied. Why? Because of a far-reaching dispute between the universities and the news media about how the Michigan Open Meetings Act applies to the process of picking a new president. The universities claim that presidential searches should take place in secrecy. They cite research that shows most good candidates will not allow themselves to be nominated if their names become public. They cite scholar John Nason: "The best qualified individuals are often the least inclined to submit themselves to being dressed and undressed in public." The news media, most recently last month in arguments at the Michigan Supreme Court in connection with a suit by Booth Newspapers against the University of Michigan Board of Regents, claim the prohibition on closed meetings by public bodies is both correct and absolute. Picking a new president in full public view is intrinsically good process, the argument goes. Not only that, but public universities are public bodies and, as such, are obliged to follow the Open Meetings Act, regardless of any inconvenience to them in the process of selecting a president.

How bad is the present situation? Plenty. The Michigan State University search for a successor to John DiBiaggio is, in the words of one insider, "a shambles." Trying both to conduct their search in private and avoid violating the OMA, MSU trustees designated a subcommittee to run the search. Somebody leaked to The State News, the student newspaper, a secret list of 136 candidates nominated for the job. Whereupon most of the experienced university administrators on the list promptly withdrew. The U-M Board of Regents last year vacated its duty to advise President James Duderstadt in selecting a new chancellor for the UM-Dearborn campus. The regents couldn't figure out any way to fulfill their duty of office without violating the OMA or some judge's nebulous order based on what the law might mean. Caught in the legal and political confusion, most university boards are either ducking important decisions until the Supreme Court rules or letting their presidents make decisions without their input. The policy issues are tough, settling in direct opposition two important principles. On the one hand, public universities



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are public bodies, clearly under the jurisdiction of the Open Meetings Act and therefore obliged to recognize the presumption that the best decisions are made in the full light of public scrutiny. Most newspaper editorials on the subject tolerate no deviation from this absolute position. On the other hand, members of governing boards are obliged by their office to act in the best interest of their institutions. Nearly unanimously, they believe that a public search for a president inevitably will scare off the best candidates, thereby damaging their university. And most resent being hamstrung by a mixture of ambiguous opinions by judges who don't have to deal with the consequences of their rulings and drumfire attacks from nosy editors. Because I have a foot (firmly though uneasily) on both sides of the barbed wire of this debate — I'm both a regent of U-M and an active newspaper person — I am struck at both how sensible and yet how irreconcilable these positions have become. Here's a solution to this dilemma, one that pays respect both to the principle of public conduct of public business and at the same time allows our universities to get the possible pool of presidential candidates:

Urge the Legislature to amend the Open Meetings Act such that searches for university presidents may be conducted in secret until the board has reduced the field of candidates to a short list of finalists, say no more than four. At that point, make everything about the process — background of candidates, interviews, votes — public. This process would preserve the legitimate interests of the public by requiring all decisions with consequences to be taken in public. But it would also encourage good candidates to allow their names to be put forward without fear of premature disclosure. At the end, releasing their names would force nominees to fish or cut bait as candidates. Fortunately, a bill to amend the Open Meetings Act already has been introduced by Sen. John Schwarz, R-Battle Creek. I encourage those readers who are interested in breaking the stalemate and allowing Michigan's great universities to get on with their business to write to Sen. Schwarz, Michigan State Senate, PO Box 30036, Lansing 48909. Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His touch-tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

Schools, teachers must focus on children, not power plays

QUESTION: At a social outing, I heard a group of parents talking about the 1993-94 teacher contract negotiations that are going on in our community: Some were saying the Michigan Education Association will target our district for a strike next fall because we have some money. Some of these parents have already been laid off from General Motors and other parents are in fear being laid off. I didn't hear much sympathy for teacher strikes this year. Do you think there will be many teacher strikes this fall? Answer: The Michigan Education Association is at a crossroad. The days of the militant teacher strike to gain community support — that hopefully raises the anger of local citizens toward school administration and boards of education are over. The MEA, over the years, has performed superbly for teachers. Salaries are decent, benefits excellent, working conditions improved far beyond what I experienced as a young teacher in the '60s. An era when my former Trenton High School classmate, driving a dump truck, made much more money than I — and didn't hesitate to rub it in. Auto unions in the metropolitan Detroit area were the role models in the '60s when the right for teachers to negotiate was made law — when I was president of the Plymouth Education Association. Indeed, I can remember Ken Bannon, Reuther's right hand man, telling me, "Jim, you have to get this in your mind — it is no longer professional begging, it's professional bargaining. Take your hat out of your hand and quit shuffling your feet in front of the superintendent." Good advice at that time and appropriate for those of us who got into education, not for money, but to teach kids. However, this is a new era! The MEA and local teacher organizations need to consider G.M., Chrysler and Ford automotive union's change of philosophy since their plants started relocating in Tennessee and with Mexico breathing down their back. Automotive management and union leadership is now moving into a more collegial relationship — a sharing of the decision making power for survival as opposed to the old adversary position of striking until it hurts them in the pocket. Auto union's focus now is on surviv-



DOC DOYLE

al — how to save the company and keep employment in the good ole USA. Similarly, teacher and administrative representatives, in this era of diminishing resources, need a very clear focus on the needs of the children as opposed to power plays. The truth is that teacher wages in Southeastern Michigan, along with New York and California are the highest in the country. And in Michigan, increased millage votes are in for troubled times. However, it will be a tragedy for education if citizens vote down any and all renewals to keep present programs going or bond issues for roofs that keep the rain off children's heads. A "destroy the system" position is not the answer for the '90s. One might say Doc Doyle, now retired, has joined the senior citizens group who is against taxes, schools, etc. Hardly. I have never voted against a millage or bond issue before retiring and never voted against one in retirement. I believe in our educational system with all its real and imagined faults. You ask, "Do you think there will be many teacher strikes this fall?" Very few, if any. The uncertainty of Engler's plan, the economy, Sears turning into a WalMart, G.M. possibly going under leads me to believe the MEA will not promote strikes as the answer. The MEA would be committing professional suicide in these trying times. So lets hope Boards of Education, Central Office Administration, the MEA and local teacher organizations finally figure out how to work in a collegial atmosphere, an authority and power sharing modal, as opposed to more of the same — the strikes, the angry citizens, the kids deprived — an antiquated system that has no support of the citizens — an anachronism for these times.

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