

POINTS OF VIEW

# Hey, Hollywood, I'm not watching TV!

Look, I just gave up TV for a week and I'm a little on edge and I can't deal with all this, uh, stuff. So get out of my face, OK?

That sounds like something this normally mild-mannered columnist would mutter around his home and office these days. Yeah, I'm grouchy and surly today (Tuesday) over this Operation Turnoff nonsense.

You'll remember I said in this space that I'd expel television from my life for seven days in May if an Observer reader or two would go along for the ride and drop TV for that period, too.

Well, the support was there (Hey, Bev and Tom Cornell of Farmington Hills and David and Urmie Staudacher of Southfield, you guys had better not be cheating), so I had to do it. I had to put the boot to the boob tube.

Last Sunday, May 16, was the switch-off day. My new 25-inch Zenith went dark. And it's stayed dark... about as dark as my mood right now.

Now, get off my back, critics. It's damn hard to kick this habit. You don't think so, you just try it. It's one thing not to watch TV for an hour or two or even a day. It's another to know you can't watch those flickering images for a long time.

I'm only 2 1/2 days into this silly project and I'm like seven gallons of spoiled milk in your refrigerator.

What a week I picked to give up TV. It's the May ratings sweeps — one of the most important weeks of the year for the people who give us television.

Whether the programming comes from California or Southfield (where so many of our local TV stations are located) or downtown Detroit, they want you to watch it this week. But I'm not watching.

It's no accident that "Cheers" is ending with a two-hour swan song this week. Millions will watch it Thursday. Not me. I'm not watching.



TOM BAER

And it's not a coincidence that CBS dropped the bombshell today — during the sweeps — that Connie Chung would share the anchor desk with Dan Rather on the evening news show.

And, when it comes to local news, our power-suited Pollys and pompadoured Peters usually wait for sweeps time to tell us that the water could be dangerous and the meat might be deadly.

Anything to get you to watch. But I'm not watching.

So, what's it like in a world with no TV? Well, Monday night I felt this way about it: It's like being very tired and lying down in your back yard to sleep. You're on the cold, hard ground, and you think to yourself: Why am I sleeping on the ground when I own a bed with a mattress and even clean sheets?

Why indeed. I guess it all started as one man's protest against all the junk that's on TV. And, let's be honest about it, there is a lot of junk on TV. It comes from California and New York. It comes from Southfield and downtown Detroit.

Is there anyone out there who can seriously deny the accusation that the TV airwaves and cables are clogged with junk these days?

I've always believed that we'd be better, brighter people today if, in the 1940s, Howard Armstrong's vision of FM radio had been allowed to prevail

over David Sarnoff's idea of commercial television.

But NBC's Sarnoff, one of the most powerful men in corporate America, won that battle and the war and the peace that followed. TV came, and the brilliant inventor (FM radio and the superheterodyne radio circuit) Armstrong went... out the window of his New York apartment building, a tragic suicide.

And now we're burdened with TV, with its news scares during ratings sweeps, douche ads and endless reruns of "The Brady Bunch." Hey, let's not forget sweet Vanna turning her letters.

That's why I'm not watching. For one week. As difficult as it may be, I'm not watching.

Tom Baer is the editor of the Farmington Observer. He looks forward to watching "Saturday Night Live" at one second past midnight on Sunday, May 24.

# 'Old coot' grapples with growing, uh, distinguished

I hope you're happy. Now we belong to three of those so-called warehouse clubs.

What are you grousing about? You said this one was really nice. Besides, it's a good deal. It only costs 15 bucks a year and we each get a card.

Right. With The Discount.

Oh, I see. Are you still mad about that?

I can't believe she called me an old coot.

She didn't.

Did, too.

No, she didn't. All she said was if we listed you as the primary card holder instead of me, we could get the senior citizen discount and get our cards for \$16 a year instead of \$20. We save five bucks and we each get a card. It's a lot better than that other place where I pay \$26 and only get one card. This

way you can go shopping by yourself if you want to.

"Big deal. And since when did they start calling people over 60 'senior citizens'?"

"Don't be so sensitive."

"And you had to make that crack about the AARP."

"All I said was if you can join the AARP at 60 I guess you should be able to get the senior citizen rate at a discount shopping place."

"Yeah, right. You had to bring it up. Besides, the only reason I joined the AARP was because we get a good deal on their Motor Club. And discounts at motels. And rental cars."

"There you go again."

"And how did she know I was over 60 anyway? I didn't know you put our ages down on the application."

"I didn't."



JACK GLADDEN

"You... uh... didn't?"

"Oh, I guess she got it off my driver's license."

"You didn't show her your driver's license."

"I didn't, did I? Then how..."

"I guess she could tell."

"Thanks a lot."

"Well, it's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I look old."

"You look... distinguished."

"How did she know, anyway? And in front of all those people."

"Dear, don't worry about it. Just put the stuff in the car and drive."

"Maybe you should put it in. It's pretty heavy."

"Oh, for heaven's sake."

"Maybe you should drive. I'm not feeling too well."

"Good grief!"

"All right! I'll put the stuff in the car. I'll drive. Maybe a little slower than usual, but I'll drive. Uh, you wanna stop for lunch?"

"Where?"

"I was thinking about Denny's."

"Denny's? Whatever made you think of that? We never go to Denny's."

"I know, but... they give discounts to old coots."

"Will you stop it with that old coot business. Let's just go home. I'll make you some mush or something."

"Very funny. Maybe we should start looking for a new place to live. Something on one level."

"Look, if it's going to upset you this much, just give me your card. I'll tear it up and we'll pretend it never happened."

"Give up the card? And lose my senior citizen discount? No way. This old coot stuff might not be so bad after all."

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric newspaper. Until recently he considered himself middle-aged. But now...

# Lobbyists infest nation's annual political gridlock

Sometimes two entirely unrelated events coincide in a way that provides new insight on both.

So it was last week: President Clinton rolled out his political reform package, and inside Michigan Politics newsletter published its second survey ranking Lansing lobbyists.

The national proposal would provide partial public funding for congressional races, now overwhelmingly funded by PACs, and limit the financial influence of lobbyists for special interests.

Democratic U.S. Reps. Bill Ford of Ypsilanti, Sander Levin of Southfield and Dale Kildee of Flint said they supported the legislation and expected it to pass. Opposed were Democrat Bob Carr of East Lansing, who said he was adamantly against any taxpayer subsidy for elections, and Republican Joe

Knollenberg of Birmingham, who wanted a certain percentage of campaign funding to come from constituents.

The IMP survey was mostly Lansing insider stuff about which lobbyists had the highest "power rating" and which multi-client firms were most effective.

Buried in the report were two sentences that astonished me:

"No. 1: Nearly half of those responding to this year's poll claimed daily contact on a professional basis with a lobbyist or lobbying organization, and three-quarters had contact at least twice a week."

"Whether it's 2,000 or so registered lobbyists and assorted influence peddlers in Lansing or the 80,000 (President Clinton's number) in Washington, the survey confirms what I long have argued: Lobbyists literally infest the legislative process."

"No. 2: More than half of the survey's respondents have been employed by or dealt with state government for more than 10 years, and nearly 80 percent for a minimum of three years."

"Whether it's a reformist new governor of Michigan or a populist new president, the political facts of life are the same: What really counts is the permanent culture of the capital.

And that culture is erected on the twin realities of our contemporary politics: The main career goal of our professional politicians is reelection, and that can best be financed by thinly disguised bribes ("campaign contributions")



PHILIP POWER

**We — politicians, citizens, lobbyists — are all trapped inside a political system we all know is rotting at the core. But the system is so all-pervasive that nobody can find a way out.**

from lobbyists representing special interests who have something to gain from the transaction.

We — politicians, citizens, lobbyists — are all trapped inside a political system we all know is rotting at the core. But the system is so all-pervasive that nobody can find a way out.

Incumbent politicians know full well they are spending far too much of their time chasing money. Challengers realize the deck is stacked against them and swear if they get elected, they'll make sure no challenger ever comes close.

Citizens are furious at gridlock and at their lack of access to a system of unresponsive government. Lobbyists, often very able and experienced people, have a job to do and rationalize their activity on the grounds that everybody does it, so why not me?

I doubt any political reform legislation will ever eliminate lobbyists or slash the power of special interests. But we must keep trying to find a way to overcome the cynical realism of most people that government as it is presently practiced has no particular interest in responding to the needs of ordinary folks.

That's why political reform proponents, whether in Lansing or Washington, need vocal citizen support.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His touch-tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

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