

POINTS OF VIEW

Talk show hoaxter has them reach out to touch someone

The Feminist was laughing her head off when I got home from work Wednesday. She was listening — as usual — to that infernal talk radio station — WXYT-1270. "What's so funny?" I asked. "This is a hoax," she said. "David Newman's pulling another hoax and his callers are all up in arms." "So how do you know it's a hoax?" "It's gotta be. It's too outrageous to be anything else. But these callers don't get it."

She filled me in. Newman's "guest" was some guy named "Joe Callahan," a 39-year-old Livonia resident, who had been named to head up the "enforcement" unit for Bill Clinton's health care plan. The enforcement unit was known as the Health Bureau of Investigation — HBI for short.

"I thought something was wrong when David said Callahan had been the subject of an interview published in the Livonia Eccentric recently," I said. "There is no Livonia Eccentric," I said.

"I know that," she said. "And so does David. But what really tipped me off was when some caller asked what would happen to doctors who didn't comply with the terms of the health plan. 'Callahan' — or whoever he is — said, 'They'll go to jail.'"

By now I was interested enough to listen in. Sure enough, according to Mr. "Callahan," anyone who didn't sign up for the right kind of insurance coverage under the plan, any employer who didn't follow the rules of the plan, any doctor who didn't go strictly by the books, would end up in the slammer — maybe for as long as five years. The HBI was going to be a tough enforcement unit.

And she was right. Newman's callers were livid. They were outraged. They were furious. But Mr. "Callahan" was unmoved. Rules were rules and the HBI was there to enforce them.

Near the end of the program a woman caller identified herself as the "wife" of the reporter who had written the article in the Livonia "Eccentric" and said that there was some additional information that hadn't been brought out in Newman's broadcast —



JACK GLADDEN

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something about doctors being allowed to perform community service instead of doing jail time.

"Callahan" said that yes, indeed, there was a provision for some kind of community service in some cases. Newman thanked the woman for calling and quickly cut her off. After the last rate caller had hung up, Newman closed the show and confirmed The Feminist's suspicions: It had all been a hoax. "Joe Callahan" was really one of Newman's producers, there was no Health Bureau of Investigation and, although no one said it, there had, of course, been no interview with "Callahan" published in the nonexistent Livonia "Eccentric."

"Satire" was the way Newman explained his hoax. The whole interview had been phony, but he was trying to make a point — a point about how far things could go in a society in which Big Brotherism seems to be growing and growing.

When I got to work the next day, I was not thinking about David Newman and the HBI hoax. Not, at least, until the receptionist approached my desk with a copy of the Livonia Observer in her hand and a scowl on her face.

"Do you know anything about a story we ran about some guy named Callahan and something called the HBI?"

"Oh, geez!" I said. "Who wants to know?"

"Some caller. She wants a copy of the story."

"She must have been listening to David Newman."

"Yeah," the receptionist said. "She said she heard about it on his show."

"Let me talk to her."

It took some talking, but I managed to convince the caller that I, too, had been listening to the broadcast and at the end David Newman said it was all a hoax. There was no Joe Callahan and there was no story about him in our paper.

Six callers later I told the receptionist to stop giving me those calls and no, I was not going up to the lobby to deal with those people who had come in person to get a copy of the Callahan interview.

Although Newman spent much of his Thursday show making it clear that the HBI show was a hoax, people were still calling us on Friday wanting copies of the story.

But it's OK, David. The show was a good out-on and most of the people I talked to ended up laughing after I managed to convince them that their lovable talk-show host had been pulling their legs.

Still, if it was all a hoax, who was that mysterious caller who identified herself as the wife of the reporter who wrote the Callahan piece?

Hmmm.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor for Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Dual scandals require some soul-searching by all those charged

It seems to me the good ole boys (and maybe a gal or two) got interrupted in the process of doing business as usual.

The charges that fell on the Rochester Hills mayor and her former assistant, a former Oakland County Sheriff's captain, and five other officers as well as three work release prisoners, cannot be blown off.

Neither should they take their place alongside Watergate.

However, some serious blows have been dealt to the community of Rochester Hills; to the administration, if not the integrity of the sheriff's department; and to the county as a whole.

To that end, Rochester Hills Mayor Billie Ireland would serve her community best — not by resigning — but by taking a leave of absence from her office until the charges against her have been resolved.

This doesn't speak to her innocence or guilt. It's just that, for the time being, her stature and ability to represent her community are in question. If she really cares about that community, she will want it to always put its best foot forward and move on without her, at least for a while.

It would certainly be in keeping with the move by Sheriff John Nichols, who has suspended without pay those officers still on the force until their cases are resolved.

Those are officers sworn to uphold the law — and Ireland also takes an oath of office.

Nichols himself must also think long and hard about whether the charges brought are in any way a result of his being in office too long — entrusting too many of his duties to those under him — or turning a blind eye to ole boy conduct.

All of us who have held the same job for a number of years know that it can get stale, we can become too inbred or numbed by the sameness of duties.

Nichols has always been known as a man of integrity. If he thinks it through, and finds himself lacking, he



JUDITH DONER BERNE

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knows what he must do.

However, the contention by Gerard Carlin, the former captain and now suspended sergeant, that he will continue his plans to run for sheriff is ludicrous.

It reminds me a little of former state Sen. Rick Fessler, who ran for prosecutor four years back, after a widely publicized incident in which he refused to take a Breathalyzer test, and was later convicted of drunk driving.

If Carlin is found innocent of 29 felony and four misdemeanor counts, then by all means run like a rabbit. But meantime, don't abuse the time and intelligence of Oakland County voters.

Judith Doner Berne is managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can reach her at 901-2563.

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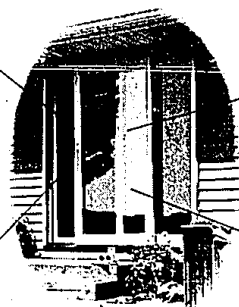
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