POINTS OF VIEW

Faxon's sense of history stands out in Lansing

I'll miss Jack Faxon in the state Senate. But for his sake, it's good he's bowing out now, at age 57, after 34 years in office.

Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, has been among my favorites in both parties because he has a sense of history. A lawmaker with a sense of history realizes he or she is part of a continuum; that able people preceded him, and he stands on their shoulders; and able people will come after him.

Govs. Jim Blanchard, in particular, and Bill Milliken had a sense of history. President John F. Kennedy, after 1960, lost it, arguing with bloated egotism that things began "moving" with him where all was stagnant before.

I first saw Faxon at the 1962 Constitutional Convention as he guided a group of Detroit high school students around the Lansing Civic Center digs. Faxon was one of many delegates to launch their careers on the Con-Con pad. Others were Gov. George Romney, Judge Richard Kuhn, Weldon Yeager, Coleman Young, William D. Ford.

Faxon alone, however, made frequent references during Senate debate to the Michigan Constitution. He didn't use staff reports. He knew the constitution and read it.

When he represented northwest Detroit, Faxon championed the monetary cause of the Detroit school district. The story was that he decided what total state aid it needed, then concocted elaborate formulas to provide the desired result. Senate minority leader Art Miller, D-Warren, agreed:

"He has done more for schools, and before reapportionment changed his boundaries, he used to reside in and be the senator from Detroit. You heard so much about Detroit schools, and the rest of the school districts got short-changed because he manipulated the appropriation process. . .

"Now it's the other way around. He champions (suburban out-of-formula districts) and screens the Robin Hood effects."

Many lawmakers sit silently on their bohunkuses and vote. Not Faxon. He was verbal on almost every issue. Selfishly, I admit the guy is money in my pocket, because I could always count on him for a colorful quote from a local guy that told the story. My reputation as a writer rests in part on being able to turn Faxon's 200-word sentences into pithy summaries that illuminate an issue, whether you agree with him or not.

TIM RICHARD

■ Jack Faxon's stock in trade was his ability to tack on amendments that benefited his district. His job became harder and harder as the Engler regime and modern governance theory sought lump-sum bills with fewer line items.

Operator of a private school, the multi-lingual Faxon often acted as translator for visiting Europeans.

Faxon's stock in trade, as Miller said, was his ability to tack on amendments that benefited his district. His job became harder and harder as the Engler regime and modern governance theory sought lump-sum bills with fewer line items.

The reformed school aid budget is one example. Engler's new state arts council is another. They left no room for Faxon amendments. The man became visibly more disappointed each month.

This year, Faxon was reapportioned into a new, Republican-leaning Senate district. Either he would have had to face Sen. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, or move east to a new district. Faxon did neither. He chose to retire.

A personal promoter as well as legislative guardian of the performing arts, Faxon took a lot of heat from the politically uninitiated when he failed to show up for the 30-hour Dec. 23-24 sessions that produced school finance reform.

What most folks didn't comprehend is that everything takes 20 yes votes. It doesn't matter if there are 18 no votes or two. Because he opposed all the bills, Faxon didn't need to be there.

Faxon performed instead in "The Nutcracker" ballet (it was a walking part, not a dancing one). Honigman said Faxon probably did the public more good by performing on stage rather than in the Senate chamber. I contend that Faxon, if present, would have lengthened the session three hours with futile speeches. His absence was an act of mercy on his colleagues.

A sense of history. . . love of the constitution. . . devotion to public education in his district. . . devotee of fine arts. . . a great news source.

At the outset I said able people will follow Faxon. Let's hope I'm right.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. He can be reached by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1881.

LETTERS

'Story was wrong'

In your attempt to inform the community on the future of the Community Center, there were several discrepancies in the article of the May 19 edition of the Observer that need to be corrected.

The salary quoted was incorrect. The former director's salary was $28,000.

The statement that as mayor in 1987 I leveraged $200,000 for the capital renovations is totally incorrect. The fund drive took place in 1989, and at that time, although I was a member of the council, my efforts in raising the funds were done as a concerned member of the board of directors of the center.

Your article implies that the office of mayor was the force that resulted in the success of that drive. It is crucial that the residents be assured that this is absolutely not true.

In light of arguments being made alluding to the "clout" of the mayor who is elected at-large, it is most important that the residents understand that what you are titled is not important; what you accomplish counts.

I repeat, my success in the aforementioned fund-drive efforts was not due to nor during my term as mayor of Farmington Hills.

I regret no mention was made of the $15,000 capital fund drive now under way to air condition the entire first floor. To date, we have reached 75 percent of our goal. It would have been very informative to report this positive initiative to the residents.

The statement that most activities are held during the day is again incorrect. The real fact is that activities are ongoing throughout the day and evening.

However, I did say that the center was presently planning new and innovative programs, classes, and services to enhance the use of the facility.

Another error in the article was that the grant of $4,000 was received from the F & M Company. The correct information is that the grant was given to the center by the "Target organization," not "F & M."

It would be proper for the Observer to correct this mistake in your next edition, and also a letter of apology to the Target company would also be appreciated by the center. This kind of mistaken reporting does little good for the center in receiving future support from the Target organization.

The IBM grant has not been received. My statement was, "We are in the process of applying for a computer grant for the bookkeeping office." We are confident that we will be successful in this endeavor.

The article continued to address the center as the "Farmington Community Center." For the past four years it has been known as "The Community Center, Farmington/Farmington Hills," just as the sign at the front entrance reads. I would appreciate you marking your files to reflect our correct name.

The new bookkeeper is not a new addition. It was a replacement for the bookkeeper who had moved to another position. The center has always had bookkeeping personnel.

I would like to make abundantly clear that the center initiated and developed the programs in Farmington Township, and these programs were duplicated by the new agencies such as Parks and Recreation, the YMCA, the library, and the Mercy Center, now named the Farmington Hills Activity Center.

It also was not mentioned that the center is manned by the greatest group of staff and volunteers, who give time and energy toward keeping the center an important part of the formula for our quality of life. We welcome anyone who would like to join us and be a part of the center.

Also not mentioned was that we receive no subsidy from either Farmington Hills nor the city of Farmington. The revenues from classes, rentals, and donations are the lifeline of the center.

On behalf of the center, I thank the Observer for the article. But in all fairness to the center and the community, it is important to correct the inaccurate statements of the article, and give the residents the correct facts.

The center is alive and getting well. With community support, we will continue to be a valuable asset to our residents.

Ben Marks, executive director
The Community Center

Lansing could get nastier as able legislators leave

At a recent Republican fund-raiser, former Gov. William G. Milliken drew a standing ovation for a speech which questioned whether politicians these days "have the courage to seek a reasonable, centrist balance."

"Have we the humility," he continued, "to accept that our ideas are not the only ideas and that civility and thoughtful dialogue accomplish more than voices raised in anger?"

His point was echoed by speeches after the May 10 filing date from retiring lawmakers who worried that the Legislature is no longer a place for reasoned debate and compromise. The middle ground no longer exists, they complained, with each legislator increasingly compelled to follow in lock-step the instructions of special interests that fund the campaign and support his or her career.

From the point of view of lobbyists, of course, the disappearing middle ground is just as it ought to be. After all, the money they contribute to fund-raisers is explicitly for the purposes of advancing the specific interests of their clients. In this world, finding a sensible compromise — the traditional Holy Grail of legislative politics — is an admission of failure.

In addition to an especially nasty atmosphere in Lansing, all this has produced big-time public cynicism with the political process, according to polls taken by Public Sector Consultants after the vote on Proposal A. Fewer than one-third surveyed said they believed their total tax burden would go down as a result of Proposal A.

Growing cynicism is not new, of course. It gave major thrust to the successful campaign for term limits for legislators. But in my view, the net effect of term limits will be to remove from the Legislature exactly those veteran lawmakers whose skill at compromise has made the middle ground of Michigan politics so sane and sensible for so many years.

Consider some of those who will not run again:

■ **Rep. Dick Young**, from western Wayne County, a sane and smart old-style politician who promoted more common sense than most.

PHILIP POWER

■ **Sen. Fred Dillingham**, from Livingston County, who made a career out of passionate conservatism.

■ **Westland's Sen. Bill Faust and Rep. Justine Barns**, both solid citizens who avoided the occupational disease of shooting off their mouths.

■ **Sen. Jack Faxon**, of Farmington Hills, who usually made more sense than his instinct for the outlandish would suggest.

■ **Rep. Bill Keith**, of Garden City, who single-handedly brought work force skills into the mind of the Legislature.

Every one of these lawmakers took PAC (political action committee) money from the special interests; that's political reality today. But their long service in the Legislature enabled all to balance their obligations to the lobbyists with their instincts for the middle ground. That's what made them so valuable to the politics of our state.

I have no idea what kind of people will be replacing them.

But I do know that they are unlikely to have the wisdom and experience to avoid being trapped by a system of political funding from special interests that makes extremism no sin and pointless confrontation merely good PR.

Phil Power is the chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. You can reach him by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1880.

Your opinions count...

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