

POINTS OF VIEW

Lawmakers wild with tough new laws, penalties

Michigan legislators are going nuts with their "tough new laws" and "stiffer penalties" bidding war.

No sooner does one lawmaker concoct a new way to lengthen prison sentences than another dreams up a new crime. Stalking. Lifting occupational licenses. Turning misdemeanors into felonies. Back-to-back prison terms

Of course, no one has the courage to propose higher taxes to build and operate more prisons, or more aid to communities for more cops to make more arrests. The name of the game is putting laws on paper.

The latest concerns ordinary citizens, even those of us unlikely to be arrested. Senate Bill 85, as passed, would allow county prosecutors to petition a court for authorization to issue investigative subpoenas. Prosecutors

will be able to compel testimony and charge perjury or contempt.

Prosecutors can go "judge shopping." If a district judge rejected a request for an investigative subpoena, the prosecutor could try a circuit judge.

We're not talking about testimony in a trial, where a bad guy has been charged. We're talking about the investigation of a possible felony. And we're talking about prosecutors' application that would be exempt from the Freedom of Information Act. (It's funny how any "reform" in Lansing seems to involve an exemption from the FOI act.)

There are some protections for news reporters like me, but they're of scant comfort to citizens like you.

You may ask, "Whatever happened to calling a grand jury? Doesn't this smack of awarding a prosecutor grand juror powers for fishing expeditions?"



TIM RICHARD

The House passed the bill 70 to 33, which is not a huge majority for a crime bill. Some of the more thoughtful newer members of both parties objected vocally in the June 13 House Journal.

Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, who ranks the constitution higher than his party's platform: "Although the origins of the grand jury system are obscure, it is clear that it emerged some-

time in 12th Century England to protect witnesses from the unrestrained power of the monarchy, which served as the executive branch of government at the time."

Kaza said the grand jury process provides all the investigative tools a prosecutor needs. "I am concerned that this legislation could pose a number of serious constitutional problems. . . It is also troubling to ponder that this legislation could be used by the government to harass and intimidate citizens with political and religious views opposed by the authorities."

Rep. Howard Wetters, D-Kawkawlin, who shows an increasing propensity to cut through bullfeathers and get to the heart of a matter: "This bill will allow overzealous local prosecutors to legally violate many of the constitutional protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. . ."

"This bill will allow local prosecutors to bring in citizens off the street, who have committed no crime, and question them about crimes that may have been committed. If the law-abiding citizen doesn't want to comply with the request, they become a 'criminal' in the eyes of the law and can be fined (\$10,000) or imprisoned (one year) — all this when the prosecutor has charged no one with a crime. . ."

There were other good guys who voted no, such as David Gulbow, D-Huntington Woods; Tom Kelly, D-Wayne; Deborah Whyman, R-Canton; and Kirk Profit, D-Ypsilanti. By the time this column is printed, Gov. John Engler will probably have signed the measure. Wear big boots.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, ext. 1881.

LETTERS

A better way

Re: Phil Power's bilingual column of June 16.

Of the '40s when I was in school, children that were displaced persons, unable to speak or understand English, were placed in our classrooms on a regular basis.

Within a period of a few months, these kids were speaking English well enough to keep up with the class effort. The only special lessons given to them were an extra half hour every day after school was over, in speaking English.

In fact after a few months (about two) these children were teaching their parents to speak and read English.

You see, they knew that they had to master the English language if they hoped to get ahead, so they did so eagerly.

Not so today. They feel its their right to demand otherwise. That if they don't make it, the government will have to take care of them.

What an insult to millions of immigrants who have assimilated into the American culture and language and have gone on to help build this nation. The worst part of it all is that the American judiciary and government, along with "teaching innovators" (lots of empires built), are largely the guilty parties in this debacle.

Being a moderate conservative (not ultra), I also lay a large share of blame at the feet of liberal and ultra-liberal philosophy rampant in the educational establishment and among government policy makers. Makes them feel good. I say this knowing you are a moderate liberal and in no way is it my intent to insult you. After all, we are in agreement here.

Tom Murphy, Farmington Hills

Thanks, guv

Dear Gov. John Engler: Congratulations for a job well done. There is a time for strawber-

ries and a time for raspberries, a time for "no" and a time for "yes." This time "no" was the best answer.

By saying "no" to additional gambling you have saved many people from headaches and heartaches.

Most of all you can look straight in the eyes of anyone and everyone knowing you did what is best really for all people of the state of Michigan.

There are lotteries (gambling) at most street corners now. To have casinos also will take away from lotteries.

Some may say, "With casinos people would spend twice as much in gambling." That takes away money that should be used for food and necessary things of life. As you said, "Children then suffer." Detroit would then need more policemen and on and on. You do not judge a cake by its frosting.

Until people wish and love to live in Detroit, the city cannot make a comeback. Perhaps a special visit to Detroit suburbs by its officials would be in order. See what they have over Detroit. As of now people will pay thousands

of dollars for a vacant lot in the suburbs over buying in Detroit for less. Why?

Leslie E. Swanson, Farmington

Going downhill

The city of Farmington Hills deserves much better than it has in city government and city police. Just read the police and fire calls listed in the Observer, which is a partial list, and you will begin to get the picture.

I was born in this community in 1933 and have seen it decline through the years as a good and safe place to live. For most of my life I was content to just ignore the state of our government and police force. But over the past few years I have seen and experienced the dreadful truth of the matter . . . and I hate it.

It isn't a matter of pouring more money into government for hiring or technical improvements. It is a matter

of lousy attitudes throughout that need to be changed, or better, replaced with people with good attitudes.

Our city officials, when faced with complaints about their actions, instead of trying to correct the problems, herd together like buffalo circling to protect themselves.

They are there to serve the citizens, not their own personal interests.

And our police department . . . God help us. We have a chief of police so concerned about his self-image he has no idea of what is going on in his own department.

That department needs leadership and control in the best interests of the community and its citizens, not the chief and his officers. This guy has an attitude so bad you have to personally experience it to believe it.

Our 47th District Court is made up of arrogance to the 10th degree. Unless somehow the citizens can take back control of the city of Farmington Hills, that is replace the bad with good leaders, things will get worse, not better. Kenneth Kemp, Farmington Hills

If ideology drives schools, result may not be expected

The bible of the radical effort now under way to remake completely Michigan's schools is an essay by Lloyd Reusa, former president of General Motors Corp.

'Reusa's piece — which my sources tell me was commissioned and heavily edited by State Board of Education President Clark Durant — was printed up by the state as a little booklet in an edition of 6,000 (81 cents apiece). Summaries also were sent to newspapers around the state, which is how I got mine.

Two points make especially interesting reading. I offer them in quotes, together with my translation.

"The monopoly of public education must end. New forms of public ownership of schools, including non-politically based public corporations, should be explored."

In other words, the remedy for a rigid and monopolistic public school system is to let market forces drive schools, allowing some to thrive and others to die.

"Good character and individual excellence are an essential part of any community. . . Each is reflected in the life and curriculum of a school, a curriculum not compelled by the state, but called for by a free people."

In other words, in teaching morality and academics, schools should not be bound by a uniform state curriculum, but free to respond to the market demand expressed by their primary customers, the parents of children attending.

I have a strong feeling that these points, taken together, highlight a problem common to all ideologues: They are so obsessed with their ideology that they often discover, to their dismay, that the results they achieve are not at all what they intended.

Unintended Result No. 1: Balkanization of America.

All kinds of schools will be started. Some will teach Christian values (as a member of the State Board of Education evidently hopes). But what happens when the Shrine of the Black Madonna starts a school that teaches that Christ was black and pushes an Afrocentric academic curriculum? What about schools teaching entirely in Albanian or Arabic? What about schools not open to students unless they are of Japanese descent?

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PHILIP POWER

The point here is that public schools for generations have been the primary device in which immigrants and others in our heterogeneous population have become Americans.

erations have been the primary device in which immigrants and others in our heterogeneous population have become Americans. If the schools were to follow the Reusa prescription, there is great risk they would contribute to the further fragmentation of our country rather than eliminate it.

Unintended Result No. 2: Unemployable graduates.

Doing away with a uniform curriculum may, indeed, eliminate monopolistic rigidity. But if you combine it with the notion (also popular among radicals) of doing away with any sort of statewide uniform testing, the result is chaos in the workplace.

Jim Sandy, executive director of Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence, made this point neatly in the June issue of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce magazine: "Should performance standards be set for students? Should the curriculum of our public schools be wrapped around a set of content standards? I do not believe there is any doubt."

Beware, Mr. Reusa. Take care, President Durant. You may suffer the grave misfortune of getting precisely what you advocate.

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