

POINTS OF VIEW

Congress supports new mothers, OKs bill

Itsumi Koga, the 36-year-old Japanese woman who killed her infant son last November, is due to be sentenced today.

She pleaded guilty but mentally ill to voluntary manslaughter in Oakland Circuit Court Sept. 3. She was being treated for postpartum depression when she took her son to a pond near her Farmington Hills apartment and dropped him into it.

Married to a Japanese national who was working here for Nissan, she spoke no English although she had the company of her sister who lived with them.

In Japan, it has been reported, she would not have been charged with a crime in apparent recognition that a small percentage of women develop postpartum psychosis that can lead to suicide or infanticide.

But here, in Oakland County, Michigan, U.S.A., she was originally charged with first-degree murder, which would have carried a mandatory life sentence, if convicted.

She was jailed earlier. Now she is under a psychiatrist's care while living at her Farmington Hills apartment on a tether.

I thought about Koga when I read that Congress had passed legislation requiring insurers to pay for a 48-hour hospital stay for new mothers and their babies instead of the current 24 hours.

No, another day in the hospital probably could not have prevented the degree of postpartum depression Koga experienced.

But both getting a new mom and her baby up and out of the hospital in 24 hours and carrying through on a charge of manslaughter for an obviously disturbed and isolated new mother fly in the face of common sense and medical knowledge.

And both reflect an insensitivity to the physical and psychological impact of the birth process on women.

Sherri Glassman, a West Bloomfield nurse whose specialty is helping



JUDITH DONER BERNE

nursing mothers, says women are not developmentally ready to take care of their babies for a couple of days after birth.

It takes 2-3 days to "take in" what's happened to you, she says. Then, you are able to "take hold" and learn to care for your new baby.

In the first 24 hours, "they have no idea of what they're doing because they're not psychologically ready. It's crucial that they have a chance to get

over the birth."

She hopes that the two days in the hospital, where mother and child have built-in support, is just a first step. And that the medical community will go on to create a mandatory system of outpatient support that continues for those first days at home.

It should include, Glassman says, telephone follow-up, home visits, a "warm line" available 24-hours a day to answer questions and a field of standardized information passed on by trained personnel to help nursing mothers.

Glassman says there's a lot of different takes on postpartum depression in the medical community.

West Bloomfield psychiatrist Dr. Alan Rosenbaum confirms there's little physician research or education on what is a relatively common disorder.

In his recent study of postpartum depression, he found 40 to 80 percent of new mothers exhibit maternal blues. About 10 percent have actual

postpartum depression. One to two of every 1,000 of those women suffer postpartum psychosis and are at high risk of suicide and infanticide.

Despite those figures, "In most text books on obstetrics there are chapters on hypertensive disease (which affects many fewer women) while there is usually one page concerning postnatal depressive disorders," Rosenbaum says.

An act of Congress may force the medical community to be more sensitive to issues all new mothers face. The sentence Itsumi Koga receives today may indicate whether the legal community recognizes that something has gone terribly wrong inside a new mother who kills her baby.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of *The Eccentric*. You can comment on this column by calling (313)953-2047, Ext. 1997 or by writing or faxing Philip Sherman, who edits our opinion pages. The fax number is

Private voucher system will siphon public money

To know what John Engler will preach tomorrow, read the Mackinac Center's stuff today. The correlation isn't perfect, but it's a wise way to bet.

Mackinac Center, the ideology-peddling machine in Midland, is pushing vouchers, hard. Vouchers are gimmicks to line the pockets of private and parochial schools with taxpayer money. The gimmick is to call it "parental choice," or "family choice," or "freedom" or some other propaganda term.

Mackinac Center's Lawrence Reed issued an essay in September arguing: "Michigan has made historic progress on the road to education reform. But that road is nearing a dead-end. Children deserve so much more, but if Article VIII Section 2 (of the Michigan Constitution) stays on the books, Michigan may lose its status as a reform leader and become the nation's laggard instead."

Students of propaganda will notice familiar techniques: live children versus the abstract Article VIII Section

2. Get on the bandwagon and be a leader instead of a laggard.

Reed describes the voter-approved section of the Michigan Constitution as "language more restrictive than that of any other state constitution in the country." He conveniently forgets to mention that Michigan was the first state in the Union to guarantee, constitutionally, a free public education. Reed wants to shame us into feeling like "laggards" if we don't give taxpayer money to private schools.

"It's time," said Reed, to strip out that constitutional protection. Paul DeWeese, the Lansing physician who's in one anti-public school organization or another, says the same. GOP figures like Betsy DeVos and Sharon Wise are preaching the line.

A petition drive to change the Michigan Constitution is probable, possibly in 1997.

The governor denies it. A petition drive? "It doesn't exist," Engler said last week, dodging the question of whether it will exist in a year or two.



TIM RICHARD

"I have not seen a petition," he went on, as if his seeing it were necessary for it to exist.

"The Legislature will not put it on the ballot," he predicted, probably correctly. Everyone knows the voucher gang doesn't have two-thirds support in either chamber and that it will take a petition drive to put vouchers on the 1998 ballot.

"Straw man... classic red herring," Engler said of the strong and per-

sistent rumblings that a petition drive is brewing.

The strategy has been clear for about three years. Water down the core curriculum and educator standards. Institute as many little programs as possible that put public money into private hands. Smear the remaining constitutional restriction as hampering poor children, families and choice. Some steps:

• Most folks overlooked it, but the voucher forces, led by Sen. Doug Carl, R-Macomb County, won a big victory in the teen driver licensing act. First, they removed the requirement that public schools offer driver ed. Then they allowed a voucher system to send public money to private driving schools.

• Rep. Jessie Dalman, R-Holland, had a bill to let high school students take advance work in colleges — not just community colleges but private colleges, too.

• Charter academies were supposed to encourage innovation in public schools. Instead, private schools are lining up at the charter trough.

• Then there was the elaptrap about alternative teacher certification. They said Leo Jaccoca couldn't teach economics, Don Rieglo couldn't teach politics, Ernest Hemingway couldn't teach composition and Albert Einstein couldn't teach math under Michigan's certification rules.

Well, Hemingway and Einstein are dead, and Jaccoca and Rieglo have other career plans. The purpose of weakening teacher certification is to give the minister's brother-in-law a job.

The voucher battle is coming. And the prize is money, not good schooling for kids.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

Proficiency tests — a good measure for students, schools and employers

Last spring, 11th graders across Michigan took the new High School Proficiency Tests, designed to evaluate what kids actually learned in math, science, reading and writing.

The Michigan Department of Education released the results a couple of weeks ago. Although you'll have read the results for your local school district in this newspaper, the statewide average outcomes caused much hand-wringing:

• Math: 47.7 percent "proficient," 38 "novice," 14.3 below.

• Science: 32 percent "proficient," 52.2 "novice," 15.8 below.

• Reading: 40.2 percent "proficient," 51.3 "novice," 8.5 below.

• Writing: 34.4 percent "proficient," 53.1 "novice," 12.5 below.

Less than half of the Michigan kids who took the test were judged "proficient." Obviously, there's lots of work to do.

But embedded in the dry language of the Education Department handout — "The tests set expectations for Michigan teachers and students, will bring about curricular change, and alter instructional practice" — lies the good news.

For the first time in history, there now exists a solid, tough, quantifiable set of benchmarks against which to measure what our kids actually learn in school. Wonderful!

Newspapers like this one will print the results, school district by school district. Parents, concerned about poor scores, will get in the faces of teachers and administrators. Teaching methods, textbooks, expectations — all will change. Kids will gradually discover that getting good scores will affect their odds of getting into college or finding a good job.

It wasn't easy. Originally, reformers who urged benchmark assessments were shunned by all sides. Teachers (and more than a few parents) claimed that one statewide standard assessment system couldn't possibly be fair to their little darlings. Administrators complained that uniform statewide assessments would hurt local control. The religious right maintained that setting education standards was an anti-religious plot.

Never mind. School reform isn't rocket science. You define what you — parents, employers, society — expect educated children to learn



PHILLIP POWER

in school. You then measure what in fact they do learn. You then put pressure on the system to change, improve teaching, get better books and more computers. Then you assess again. Seems pretty straightforward.

After years of passivity in the face of declining worker skills, business is finally waking up. The members of a group called Michigan Business Leaders for Educational Excellence (MBLEE) — including the Big 3 automakers, Dow Chemical, Kmart, Comerica, the University of Michigan — employ 500,000 of the state's 4.4 million workers.

MBLEE director Jim Sandy said, "For years, we assumed that any child completing 13 years of school would be equipped with these skills (math, science, reading and writing)."

"Unfortunately, we were wrong, but these tests and the endorsed diplomas will send the message that these skills are necessary and important."

Of course, one set of test results does not a reformed school system make. It remains to be seen how rapidly an endorsed diploma will make a difference in college admissions or in the minds of personnel managers. And the chasm between results from inner city schools and others, mostly suburban, is enormous and appalling.

But at long last the process has started. We should all be grateful to the 93,000 Michigan 11th graders who sat through 11 to 14 hours of proficiency testing last spring. They helped make history.

Phillip Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

FAST YARD CLEANUP!

TROY BILT MODEL 47260

- 4 H.P. Tecumseh Engine
- Hand Push Model

\$599⁰⁰

Sugg. Retail \$1099⁰⁰

Hose Kit 1/2 Price with Purchase



TROY-BILT® CHIPPER/VAC

- Ends raking and bagging forever. You guide machine to collect, reduce and recycle debris!
- Powerful Vacuum and efficient shredder reduce volume 10:1
- Chipper for branches up to 3 1/2" thick!
- Convenient Autobagger packs material into removable bag or easy disposal!
- Optional hose attachment for in-close clean up!
- Covered by exclusive 7-Year Warranty.



All Units Include Free Prep & Set Up

TROY-BILT
Authorized Dealer

All Products Include Full Factory Warranty

-WEINGARTZ-

Michigan's Largest Lawn, Snow & Outdoor Power Equipment Dealer

Utica
46061 Van Dyke
1/2 Mile North of M-59
810-731-7240

Since 1945
Best Price
Best Service
Best Selection

Farmington Hills
Grand River
East of Haggerty
810-471-3050

HOURS: Monday & Thursday 8:30 am-8:00pm T-W-F 8:30 am-5:30 pm • Saturday 9:00 am-4:00 pm