

POINTS OF VIEW

Absentee ballots, Kaplan are election winners

Some election postscripts:

• In line at one West Bloomfield voting precinct early on election day several of my neighbors were discussing how they really enjoyed the sense of community and democracy by going to the polls as opposed to voting by absentee ballot. I agree. In the past I've been critical of those who use absentee ballots only for convenience — not because they actually will be out-of-town or have physical difficulty getting to their voting precinct.

But an event last week has made me a little less judgmental. Due to a medical emergency that occurred shortly before Election Day, a number of my family members were prevented from voting in a national election for the first time in their adult lives.

Now I also see absentee ballots as insurance policies. Once filled out and mailed, they guarantee voters will help determine the course of government — local, state and national and judicial, legislative and executive — no matter what happens in an uncertain world. There's something to be said for

that.

• Billy Ruby telephoned his mother on election day, inquiring: "So are you still a virgin voter?" His mom, West Bloomfield resident Sandra Rose, recently became a U.S. citizen after 36 years of living in this country and Nov. 5th was her first time at the polls.

As a Canadian, she had kept her distance from the political debates of family and friends, unable to translate her own views into action. Although "when I found the candidates unacceptable I was happy I didn't have to vote." This time around, "I did feel I was a part of it. I was aware of everything that was on the ballot."

However she was a little disappointed because "there was absolutely no line" when she walked into her precinct with a completed sample ballot between 9:30 and 10 a.m. "I thought I would talk to other voters." Next time she'll know to vote before 8 a.m. or after 7 p.m. if it's lines she wants.

• Steve Kaplan's gracious acceptance of the turnout in the race for Oakland County prosecutor certainly showed



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class. In a scenario that must be every candidate's nightmare, he went to bed a winner and woke up to find out he actually had lost because one community's results were erroneously recorded.

Instead of winning 2,350 votes in Troy, his Republican opponent Dave Goreya had actually received 20,350 votes. That was enough to change the outcome in a race decided by 1.6 percentage points.

Kaplan, who as a Democrat in a Republican stronghold has made two incredibly close runs for prosecutor,

could have been bitter and called for a recount. He did neither. "It wasn't incompetence, and it wasn't fraud or anything like," that he told Observer & Eccentric reporter Pat Murphy. "People make mistakes. I've certainly made my share." And, "That's just too many votes to make up in a recount."

• As the elections to Congress from Michigan of Debbie Stabenow, Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and the re-election of Lynn Rivers increase the authority of women on Capitol Hill so do the elections of new judges Nanci Grant, Kimberly Small and Julie Nicholson add female influence to our local courts.

Grant won the open judge's seat over John N. O'Brien and will be the sixth female judge on the 17-member circuit bench that serves all of Oakland County. She replaces Judge Robert Templin who is retiring.

Small defeated incumbent 48th District Court Judge Thomas Brookover to become the only female of three judges who serve Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, West Bloomfield and the tri-cities of Orchard

Lake, Sylvan Lake and Keego Harbor.

Nicholson nudged out Lisa Aandorini for the open seat in the 52nd District (3rd Division) which also gives that court its only female judge. She replaces Judge Robert Shipper on the bench for Rochester and Rochester Hills, Oakland Township, Lake Orion, Oxford and Auburn Hills.

Meanwhile it was fairly well-known that the five male judges running to retain their seats on the Oakland Circuit Court were plenty afraid that their single non-incumbent challenger might knock one of them off simply because she is a woman. Not to worry. They all handily won re-election — as they should have — since each is an asset to our Oakland bench.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of The Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column by calling (313) 953-2047 Ext. 1997 or by writing or faxing Philip Sherman, (810) 644-1314, who edits these opinion pages.

Real-time interview with a former superintendent

Clark Durant, president of the State Board of Education, feels compelled to push religion into every discussion of public schools. He has done it with his "mission" statement and his "character" ed preamble.

Durant couldn't give a home economics class a recipe for bean soup without inserting four references to the Deity and five to parental authority.

Durant, R-Grosse Pointe, is a throwback to the 18th century practice of classical education in a religious school environment. He's even out of step with Michigan's educational pioneers of the 1830s and '40s.

Let us interview Franklin Sawyer Jr., Michigan's second superintendent of public instruction, who in 1841 made a written report to the governor and Legislature.

Q. Today, the Michigan Education Association and teachers are under bitter attack. What is like that in your day?

Sawyer: Yes. "While the mere spiritual teacher is treated with high respect ... the school master is looked upon with disdain and contempt. Parents regard the teacher as a mere servant, hired to do a job that nobody else can do and fit for nothing else. "Children imitate parents in habits of thinking."

Q. A lot of critics say there are too many state "bureaucrats" telling local schools what to do. What is your view?

Sawyer: "They are the guardians of our common schools."

"Whenever these official visitations (by inspectors) have been frequent, and the examination of both pupil and teacher thorough, the schools have sustained a better character."

Q. The religious right maintains that Christ has been kicked out of public schools, that ours is historically a Christian nation, and that prayer and Bible reading deserve to be allowed in pub-



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lic schools. Do you agree?

Sawyer: "Whatever the religious views of the candidate (for teacher), the inspector has no legal or other right to meddle. He may place his standard of morals; practical virtue should be one test of fitness."

"The question is not whether he (teacher candidate) is a Protestant or a Catholic, a Trinitarian or Unitarian, a Perfectionist, Latter Day Saint, Mormon or Transcendentalist; but whether he has such an unblemished moral character."

"Sectarianism never will infuse its poisonous virus into the great veins of our educational system ..."

Q. The Mackinac Center argues that teachers should be more scholarly in their chosen fields. Do you agree?

Sawyer: "College learning (in the sense of a B.A. degree) certainly is not contemplated; for that is hardly wanted in common views."

"Nor are the higher branches of academic learning essential ... An elementary school ... requires a female of practical common sense, with amiable and winning manners, a patient spirit, and a tolerable knowledge of the springs of human action."

Q. Sir, some members of the State Board of Education today say we should scrap or reduce teacher certification rules because Einstein couldn't teach math and Lee Iacocca couldn't teach business in our public schools.

Sawyer: "The annals of school keeping everywhere show that the purest minds and profoundest scholars do not always, nor indeed often, understand the art of teaching."

"In some foreign countries — Holland, Prussia and others — the art of teaching is taught like any other art." (Writer's note: Michigan adopted the Prussian model of "normal" schools, the forerunners of Eastern, Western and other regional universities.)

Q. Many today want to return to "rote" learning. Didn't 19th century educators believe in rote? Sawyer: No. "In too many schools, the mind is treated precisely as if memory were its only attribute and not gifted with the highest powers of reason."

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. Source for this column was "The Making of Michigan 1820-1869," Wayne State University Press, 1990.

Voters — muster the stamina to stay focused and be vigilant

Despite all the spinning going on, it's quite clear the voters were sending simple messages in this election: Enough with extremes of ideology and partisanship! Work together!

In Michigan, the most obvious example has to do with the State Board of Education, where two Republicans were replaced by two Democrats, meaning that the eight-member board will be split evenly between the parties.

Solidly (6-2) controlled by the GOP and chaired by right winger Clark Durant, the State Board has generated enormous controversy over the past two years by aggressively promoting charter schools — in practice, formerly private schools reconstituted to receive public tax support — as the best method of improving school performance.

Departing Republican Board member Marilyn Lundy was a regular echo for Durant. Although more moderate, Engler-appointed Louis Legg usually went along with the majority. They will be replaced by Democrats Marianne Yared McGuire, a freelance writer and former substitute teacher from Detroit, and Herb Moyer, a school administrator from Temperance.

Other than headline-grabbing rhetoric, it will be difficult to get additional radical measures through a 4-4 State Board.

And that might just mean that instead of being preoccupied with the 10,000-odd kids who attend charter schools, board members just might devote some attention to the 1.6 million Michigan children now enrolled in our public schools.

The new Michigan Proficiency tests, administered for the first time this past year, showed that although many kids in K-12 schools are showing enough proficiency in writing, math and science to win endorsements to their diplomas, there is still a long way to go. School districts that showed poor performance will need help in teacher training, curriculum, textbooks and technology — all things that a constructive State Board of Education could provide.

Moreover, the information revolution — computers, Internet, digitized data bases — should be spreading through schools all around Michigan. But it isn't enough just to install computers and modems in every classroom. Without special training for teachers to use the new technology to help kids learn — training that simply wasn't available as little as three years ago — all the technology in the world isn't going to make much difference. Again, an effective



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State Board can help.

There are, however, six weeks to go before the State Board goes to a 4-4 split, plenty of time to stir up trouble in a lame duck board.

Here's an example, little reported up to now. Education Superintendent Arthur E. Ellis recently sent out on expensive four-color slick stock document, bearing an official-looking seal of Michigan State Board of Education and soliciting advertising support for something called "The State of Our Schools — The Schools of Our State," a 20-page supplement to daily newspapers in Michigan.

Other than the fact that the solicitation letter was sent to some 400 vendors to Michigan schools — an attempted shakedown if I ever saw one — the brochure included quotes from Durant ("Bold reform is necessary") and indicated that "fundamental reform of our schools" is needed.

It looks to me as though the supplement is a thinly disguised attempt to drum up support for the pending drive to overturn the present Constitutional ban against public funds being spent for private schools.

Interesting fact, however, is that authorization for this program was never brought to the State Board of Education until some members started asking about it in August. After some huffing, a first draft was finally coughed up. The entire program has yet to be approved by the board, and you can bet that Chairman Durant will be working overtime to get it through the board while he's still got his big majority.

After the election, two more messages: Stay tuned! Be vigilant!

Philip 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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