

POINTS OF VIEW

Bill could halt wrath of time with research

Jerraine Jeffe goes to Washington this week where she has an appointment to see her congressman, Joe Knollenberg. She's going to be pleasantly surprised.

Jeffe, who last year was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, has given up her practice as a family and marriage counselor to work for passage of the Morris K. Udall Parkinson's Research and Education Act.

The bill focuses on research for Parkinson's disease and related disorders — as scientists reportedly stand on the edge of a major breakthrough toward its cure. Just last week a new drug — Pramipexole — came on the market, touted to reduce symptoms by 20 percent and hinder the disease's progression.

Jeffe, a mother and grandmother from Bloomfield Township, is attending the Parkinson's Action Network's annual Public Policy Forum. Then she'll meet with Knollenberg who represents a wide swath of our readers in Oakland and Wayne counties. She thought he was on the fence about the bill.

But Monday when I called his Washington office, I was told that Knollenberg had just been added as a co-sponsor to the Udall bill. The legislation is named for the longtime congressman from Arizona, who was forced to retire in 1992 due to Parkinson's and its complications. He presently lives at a Veteran's medical facility in Washington, D.C.

"Joe's always been supportive of the Udall bill in the past," said his chief of staff Craig Piercy. "Like diabetes, there is money to be saved," since the cost of caring for people with Parkinson's is greater than the estimated cost of a cure.

Neurologists define Parkinson's as a movement disorder resulting from an imbalance of the chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters, especially one called dopamine. Major visible symptoms include tremor, rigidity and slowness of movement. Other symptoms that develop over a period of time, if untreated, include stooped posture, a shuffling gait, "frozen" or mask-like facial expression, a tendency to speak softly and indistinctly. Parkinson's also tends to slow down or hamper swallowing, digestion and elimination.

Although you might think of it as a disease of old age, recent studies indicate that the incidence of new cases reaches a peak at about 55. About 10 percent of cases appear before age 40.

Kaza sets agenda for GOP

A history professor friend once told me, "To understand Michigan history, you have to remember there are always two Republican parties." He was correct.

The thought reoccurred to me as I perused state Rep. Greg Kaza's manifesto of early June. The third-term Rochester Hills lawmaker warned GOP leaders to pay attention to the non-ideological wishes of independent voters, particularly in the tri-county area.

In the mid-1880s, the GOP convention overthrew the powerful lumber barons to nominate Cyrus Luce, a Branch County farmer, for governor. Reformers like Hazen Pingree of Detroit, Fred M. Warner of Farmington and Upper Peninsula conservationist Chase S. Osborn governed progressively at the turn of the century.

Backers of President William Howard Taft and former champ Teddy Roosevelt had a fast fight at the 1912 Bay City convention.

In 1953, President Eisenhower's backers installed John Feikens, now a senior federal judge, as party chair. But a bloc held sway in the state Senate.

In 1961 a group of six Republican senators gathered at the home of William G. Milliken and signed what became known as the Traverse City pact. Milliken later became Senate floor leader and governor.

The others were John Fitzgerald, later a Supreme Court justice and the father of state Rep. Frank Fitzgerald of Grand Levee; Stan Thayer, an Ann Arborer who would soon topple the Senate GOP leader; John Stahlin of Belding, later on Gov. George Romney's staff; Fred Hilbert of Wayland; "Light Horse Harry" Litowich, a horse trader from rural Berrien County; and Oakland County's Farrell Roberts, later a circuit judge.

I didn't break the story in Lansing, but I was soon the first reporter to sit in on a meeting of the group in St. Joseph, where I labored as a reporter for the old Herald-Press.

Part of the moderates' pact said:

"If we are to be successful as a party, we must disavow the excesses of both the extreme left and of the extreme right in our program and political thinking. . . . The voice of moderation must prevail in the end; otherwise, the field will be vacated to the extremist. . . ."

My story concluded: "More than once, the senators said programs should be evolved on the basis of political, social and economic facts



JUDITH DONER BERNE

as with Warren Oberlee, who leads a support group that meets monthly at Pine Hill Congregational Church in West Bloomfield.

"I got the disease when I was 30," describes Oberlee, who has had a variation of Parkinson's — Multiple System Atrophy — for 10 years. "I look all the world like a Parkinson's patient." The disease first attacked his right side, so "I sat at the kitchen table and taught myself to write with my left hand." But then it took over his left side and he was forced to retire four years ago from his job in the records division of Oakland County.

Now, he needs help dressing and eating and uses a wheelchair when he leaves the house. When wife, Pat, is at work, his 12 and 9-year old daughters pitch in. "They do things most kids don't have to," Oberlee says. "They've had to grow up fast."

Because its symptoms often takes a long time to advance and it is rarely fatal, Parkinson's wasn't a compelling disease in the mind of the public until former boxer Mohammed Ali's dramatic appearance at the '96 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. "Mohammed Ali is the best thing that ever happened on behalf of Parkinson's," says Jeffe. "His wife is part of that. If I meet them (at the Washington forum) I'm going to give them both a hug."

Jeffe's original symptoms of tremors and stiffness are under control, although she tires easily. "That's why I'm in a good position to do something." She knows too well what could lie ahead. She saw her brother die as a consequence of Parkinson's. "He couldn't swallow and eat. It's not pleasant. The quality of life is horrible for a lot of people."

"I'd be the last person to take away from other diseases," Jeffe says. "But researchers say there's a great chance of finding a breakthrough in the next five years. Sometimes when they find a cure to one thing, it can benefit another disease."

For her and others with Parkinson's, she acknowledges: "the clock is ticking." 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, (810) 644-1314. Sandra Armstrong who edits these opinion pages.



TIM RICHARD

of life; the world should not be viewed through rigid, dogmatic blinders."

Litowich took heat at a county convention for being a "liberal" by voting for Fitzgerald, then 36, to chair the Senate business committee. The silver-haired Litowich, a champion of giving young guys (including reporters) a chance, denied being a liberal because "We didn't spend a cent of the state's money." He went on:

"We've got a group of half-a-dozen new, young senators — very intelligent, sound thinkers. You'll be hearing from them." He characterized Sen. Charles Feenstra, the 66-year-old Grand Rapids Old Guard member whom Fitzgerald replaced, as "vindictive. . . . You can't reason with him. He won't listen to anybody."

That story could have been written yesterday with Kaza's name in place of Litowich's. Kaza said the GOP leadership offers "excuses that ignore the fundamental reasons" for losing the House in 1996. He said GOP leaders fail to grasp the situation, sounding much like Litowich talking about Feenstra.

"The corporate welfare (Jobs Commission) budget illustrates the conflict with the Republican grass roots. The general government budget reflects the refusal to acknowledge the independent bloc," Kaza said.

Kaza has an agenda to fight "the obscene perks and privileges of the political class in Lansing and Washington." It involves observing term limits, full disclosure by lobbyists, an end to backroom deals in the Capitol, strengthening of the Open Meetings and Freedom of Information acts, and other things the old guard abhor.

It may be *deja vu* all over again. May history repeat itself, Greg Kaza.

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

Politics, not policy at heart of road issues

Our family vacation last week took us through the Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and back through southern Michigan on I-94.

They're right about Michigan's roads, especially in comparison with neighboring states. Mostly, they're terrible, except in the UP where there isn't much heavy traffic anyway. Coming into Michigan from Indiana, we found I-94 was in great shape . . . for about 30 miles. After that it was just embarrassing.

I don't know, at this writing, if Gov. John Engler, the (GOP-controlled) Senate and the (Democratic-controlled) House will finally cobble together a formula to raise the gas tax and fix the roads. And I certainly can't predict the details of the negotiations, except to be certain that an all-consuming interest in everybody's re-election will obliterate any serious attempt to get at the heart of the matter.

Responding to spring potholes, the business community, the road-building lobby and the media, the public is rightly grumpy about bad roads. Polls suggest that a four-cents a gallon tax increase is no big deal politically.

And when our masters in Lansing huff and puff and finally enact a "courageous" tax increase, their overwhelming instinct will be to insist that as many hundreds of miles of roads be repaved as possible before November 1998.

Consider, whether treating symptoms like this really makes sense.

Best estimates are that as much as one-third of Michigan's sub-surface road beds are in poor condition. Now put a one-inch deep bandage of asphalt over these bad road beds. What's going to happen?

In just a few years, these roads will be back in just as bad shape as they are today, but millions of taxpayer dollars will have been spent to little lasting purpose.

I doubt we'll hear it this time around, but some day it would be nice to hear a discussion by our political leaders that focuses on some fundamental road issues:

Jurisdiction. To his credit, Gov. Engler wants to move repair jurisdiction for some 23,000 miles of roads from the locals to the state. The existing crazy-quilt pattern of road classification and fragmented jurisdiction is an invitation to cozy deals, back-scratching and



PHIL POWER

monopoly costs.

Trucks and other heavy vehicles.

Although the trucking lobby will scream to high heaven, there remains a substantial body of evidence that heavily-laden trucks cause a hugely disproportionate share of damage to our roads and that Michigan's weight limits are far in excess of neighboring states.

One part of last week's tentative deal between the governor and the Legislature is an added \$43 million in truck fees allocated to road repair. Who knows? That may be enough, and it may not. I'd sure like to see some solid evidence about the extent of damage those enormous trucks cause and some honest hearings about weight limits in various states in the Upper Midwest.

Concrete versus asphalt. The hostile feelings between dogs and cats are nothing — no thing — compared to the historic hostility between the lobbyists for these two fine road building materials. My guess is that the Legislature, caught between two irreconcilable forces, has decided to split the difference.

Certainly, I don't know which material is best for which application. But it might be valuable to have some informed public discussion of the matter.

New design and technology. Some years ago, we were told that the state was experimenting with new road bed specifications and improved formulas for asphalt and concrete. Certainly, the evidence is that expressways in northern Europe, where the weather is just as bad as it is here in Michigan, last much longer than ours, although they cost more to build.

OK, how are the experiments going? What have we learned?

One of the sad things about what's going on in Lansing about roads is that these and other fundamental issues are not at the center of debate. They probably won't have much to do with who gets blamed for roads and taxes, but they are at the heart of the policy discussion about how best to get and keep good roads in Michigan.

Phil 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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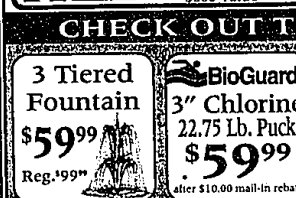
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