

LETTERS

Caregiver needs help

My name is Sandra Clark and I am a minority of one. I am a 52-year-old widowed baby boomer who lives with and cares for her mother, a victim of Alzheimer's disease. At the present time I am unemployed, but not by choice. Because I live with and care for a relative, I am unable to collect on Mom's extended care or on any Medicare insurance for caring for her. Because she is on the downward side of the disease, she requires more medical attention, exams, tests and personal care and she has stopped functioning well in a day care situation. I am required to be here at all times or have a qualified aide here at all times, and so I lost my job with no chance at collecting my unemployment benefits. I have tried starting an in-home business but there is little opportunity to go outside and interest companies in my abilities when it costs me \$12 per hour (minimum of four hours required). I have contacted

the church, the agency on aging and the Alzheimer's Association all to no avail, except that they ask me for money. There are no solutions offered by either city, state or federal governments. I am not a welfare recipient nor have I ever been, but then again I don't qualify for assistance so the point is moot. Because my mother receives a pension and Social Security, she is not eligible for Medicaid (just barely), making me also ineligible for the family assistance for caregivers. At the same time the apartment complex that we live in has raised her rent a minimum of 10 percent per year every year. Over 51 percent of her income now goes just to pay the rent and without some income our bills will shortly overwhelm us. A lot of baby boomers are (or soon will be) in the same position that I am in. Some are financially able to handle the problems. The laws and the mandates of the

insurance companies will soon have to change to allow us a way to care for our parents at home and let them live with some dignity. Some payment to the family caregiver or payment for the certified aide should be made to allow us the time to work and pay our own bills while still providing what is needed at home. I do not want charity. I want to work. I want to pay my bills and still give my mother the security she needs. I selfishly would also like some kind of life for myself without paying a day's wage for four hours of care. I've been refused more than minimal relief by relatives who cannot afford to help or who have their own problems to take care of at home. So, tell me who do I call? Where do I go? If there are any answers out there, please call me at (248) 476-7287. Sandra C. Clark Farmington

Note meant a lot

To the person or persons who left the note under my windshield wiper in the Farmer Jack parking lot on Nov. 11, Veterans Day (Pearl Harbor Survivor sticker): Thank you very much for your concern and appreciation for our veterans. They are the forgotten ones. Tears filled my husband's eyes when he read the note. Dec. 7 is a sad day for him, remembering the destruction around him. He was aboard a ship across from Battleship Row and saw it all. We will always cherish the note and keep it with his service ribbons. Mr. & Mrs. Martin Salata Farmington Hills

The courtesy, helpful information and professionalism of Officer Daniel Potter was outstanding. If I were in charge of citations, Officer Potter would be candidate number 1. Virginia Fitzpatrick Farmington Hills

Are they heroes?

When hunting season comes, the average hunter comes out of hibernating in front of the TV and goes out to destroy the enemy. Sounds like he's a hero, huh? Well, he's not when the enemy is a 200-pound defenseless doe. The only thing she has done is eat some leaves and maybe some grass for survival. It's just not right, especially when there could be a fawn inside the mother or a fawn that cannot live on its own. Kyle Malloy Power Middle School Farmington

Outstanding officer

I recently had occasion to report a minor rear end collision to the Farmington police station.

POINTS OF VIEW

Local government experience asset for higher offices

Television is tough to do because you have time to ask just one-third of the questions or make half the remarks you prepared. So it was on the pre-election Channel 7 "Spotlight" show when we discussed mayoral races. I observed that no mayors I could see had the credentials or interest to run for high office such as governor. Historically, it has been like that. Detroit Mayor Albert E. Cobo in 1956, Frank Murphy in 1936 and Hazen M. Pingree in 1898 ran for governor, with Murphy and "Ping" making it. Livonia Mayor Ed McNamara in 1970 made a bid for lieutenant governor. Somewhere around 1958, a Huntington Woods mayor was the GOP nominee for state treasurer. For three or four years, Democrats have talked about Detroit's Dennis Archer as a ticket leader, but Archer has too full an agenda at home to think about. Gov. Fred Warner (1903-08) started as Farmington village president

but rose politically through the Senate and secretary of state offices. Michigan Lt. Gov. Jim Brickley (1970-74 and '78-82) started his career on the Detroit council, but was U.S. attorney and president of Eastern Michigan University when Gov. Bill Milliken tapped him as a running mate. More on Brickley later. Other states have had governors who came up through city hall. California's Pete Wilson was mayor of San Diego (before going to the U.S. Senate), Ohio's George Voinovich and Frank Lausche were mayors of Cleveland. Florida's Bob Martinez emerged from Tampa. Former Livonia Mayor Bob Bennett, who had no yen for higher office, reflected on the scarcity of Michigan mayors who ran for statewide office. Mayors are oriented toward doing a job for home folks rather than puffing up themselves for a statewide audience, he believes. Many of our progressive cities, such as Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo,



TIM RICHARD

have city manager systems, where the mayor does little more than chair council meetings. (The home rule act says every city must have a mayor, whether or not he or she has any independent power.) Bill Clinton was governor of a state with 1 percent of the U.S. population when he was elected president. So why couldn't a city with 1 percent of Michigan's population (94,000 plus or minus) produce a governor? That would make Dearborn, Westland, Livonia, Southfield and Warren

farm clubs for the State Capitol. Yet it isn't happening. This is not just about political machinations. There is a gut reason that it would be desirable to have a governor with first-hand experience running a municipality. The reason is urban sprawl. Urban sprawl occurs when you pave over land faster than your population rises. Urban sprawl isn't "growth." In Michigan in one decade, we paved over the equivalent of the entire area of Washtenaw and Livingston counties with little rise in population. Urban sprawl raises our taxes (new roads, schools) and depletes natural resources. With urban sprawl, we pave over farmland for big-lot housing, industries and mega-malls. So we must ship food from a greater distance. Food shipped a long distance loses freshness, has more preservatives, and is handled by more people. Think of all the tainted food news

stories you've read or heard in the last few years. Why did those Battle Creek schoolkids get sick from strawberries? Because the strawberries were imported from Mexico. Whatever happened to Michigan strawberries? Gove's John Engler and Jim Blanchard, whatever their other merits, didn't grasp the meaning of "urban sprawl." Milliken, influenced by Brickley, did understand it and actually took steps to preserve old downtowns. Urban sprawl is a gut issue, literally, and a more important problem than teen gangs, parental control of the schools, and many junk issues that gubernatorial candidates will discuss in 1998. And it's why city halls, with their knowledge of land use planning, should produce more candidates for high state office. Tim Richard reports on the local implication of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

Prison priorities need fixing

So Gov. John Engler wants to build five new prisons. In a special report to the Legislature last week, the governor argued that Michigan will exhaust its prison capacity as early as next month and needs right away to start construction on 5,400 new beds. That's fine. No red-blooded politician dares oppose locking up murderers, felons and drug dealers. And just maybe, our prison system is up against court orders prohibiting overcrowding. But sooner or later, somebody is going to have to pay tough-minded attention to costs, efficiency and priorities. State Rep. Donald Gilmer, vice chair of the House Appropriations Committee, is off to a start: "I'm personally convinced we could build a hundred new prisons and we'd never have enough. If we continue this way we will eventually spend every dime we have on corrections." Predictably, the governor's message did not estimate the capital or operating costs for the new facilities he wants. Best guess around Lansing is that debt service and additional operating costs, mainly for guards and other prison staff, would add up to an extra \$150 million each year. Currently, the Department of Corrections spends more than \$1.3 billion annually to house around 43,000 inmates at state prisons, camps and halfway houses. That's something like 15 percent of the general fund budget that went to state, way up from the 5 percent that went to Corrections in FY 1982-83, when the prison budget was \$228 million. Over the next 15 years, the growth in spending for Corrections has far outstripped the growth in any other state department. State Rep. Kirk Profit, undersheriff of Washtenaw County from 1980-84 and so immune to charges of criminal codding, has been grumbling about excessive spending on prisons for years. He makes some interesting points: Michigan's average daily cost per inmate is \$63, whereas the average daily cost per inmate in Ohio is \$37. If Michigan's prisons were run as cost effectively as Ohio's, our state would save more than \$250 million per year. Michigan incarcerates 430 people for every 100,000 residents. Indiana's rate of incarceration is 279 inmates per 100,000 residents. Should Michigan choose to imprison our residents at the same rate as Indiana's, taxpayers would save more than \$400 million per year.



PHILIP POWER

Another way to look at Michigan's prison policy is as a matter of relative priorities as defined by the way our government spends its money. Michigan's priorities are these, in order: We spend an annual average of \$25,000 per inmate in prison, \$5,500 per student in our K-12 school system, around \$4,000 per student in our state colleges and universities, and an average of \$2,000 per mental health recipient. The conclusion is simple. State policy, as reflected in actual spending, considers warehousing felons as four times more valuable than educating our kids. That's ridiculous, of course. But thinking about priorities in this way helps highlight the enormous amount we are spending on our prison system. My guess is that Engler is right to argue that our prison system is dangerously close to overcrowding. And political reality, with an election year coming, is that the Legislature will make sure it is all for locking up criminals. But it might be a good idea to link building new prisons with creating a serious blue-ribbon commission to take a searching look at the cost-effectiveness of Michigan's prison system and make recommendations. Just why is it that Ohio's costs are \$18 per day per inmate less than Michigan's? How has it come about that a bunch of federal judges are effectively micro-managing our prisons in matters ranging from the number of inmates per cell down to the kinds of basketball shoes the taxpayers are required to buy? Sometimes commissions of this sort can be very effective, especially in a highly charged political environment. And with \$1.3 billion to look at, I'm sure some hard-headed folks could ask a lot of questions, shed a lot of light and, maybe, find some ways to save a lot of money. 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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