

LETTERS

Kids need both parents

In 1992, deadbeat dads owed nearly \$34 billion to their 23 million children. And "49 percent default on their child support agreements" according to a column written July 29, 1994, by Ellen Goodman. This has been universally accepted until recently as fact. It was based on Theoretical Mathematical Models and not based on cold hard facts. The real facts are as follows: the Current Population Reports by the U.S. Census Bureau puts that figure at \$14.8 billion dollars owed. Seventy-five percent or 11.1 billion has been paid. That leaves \$3.7 billion owed, a far cry from \$34 billion! Current information from multiple sources indicate 10 percent of non-custodial fathers fit the "deadbeat dad" category. Fathers with joint custody pay 90.2 percent of ordered child support, ones with visitation pay 79.1 percent and 44.5 percent of those with NO visitation rights still support their children, (source: US Census Bureau report, Series P-23, No. 173.)

The problem is the \$34 billion dollar figure is still accepted as correct and politicians need to be educated about the correct figures. While we condemn the current multi billion dollars owed in back child support, the figures do not warrant the type of treatment responsible yet financially strapped non-custodial parents are receiving.

Furthermore, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala has said that with increased enforcement \$50 billion in back child support can be collected. (Wall Street Journal, March 2, 1995). Yet in that same article they take a hard look at the figures and come to a much different conclusion. In the government's Annual Child Support Report of 1992 the figures were at \$10.9 billion owed in court ordered child support, of that, \$6 billion had been paid. That left less than \$5 billion owed! Of the \$5 billion owed 30 percent of those owing are in jail and as many as one-third of the prisoners in county jail are in for

non-payment of child support. Many of the other "dead beat fathers" are addicts, alcoholics, disabled, mentally incapacitated, unemployed (or underemployed), or otherwise unable to pay court ordered child support. However the largest number of those that owe back child support simply do not exist. In 1992 the General Accounting Office (GAO) found 14 percent of fathers who owe back child support are dead. In a 1991 Census Bureau study found half of all fathers received no visitation order. When fathers receive visitation almost 80 percent pay all court ordered child support. When they receive joint custody the figure jumps to 90 percent. Yet joint custody is awarded in around 10 percent of all divorce cases. According to two independent studies 40 to 60 percent of all mothers interfere or block meaningful access to the children. "Given this documented connection between father's access to his children and the payment of child support, why does Washington seem intent on punishing the father? What about the mother who creates a climate encouraging non-compliance?" (Wall Street Journal March 2, 1995). The Clinton Administration has since backed off on Donna Shalala's figures.

We have witnessed over the years a campaign of misinformation, outright lies, ignorance of the facts, gender bashing, political pasteurizing and vindictive attitudes in all levels of this "problem." The question that needs to be asked are at what cost to family, children and society? Is this new generation of children from broken families seeing this type of governmental attitude and enforcement going to result in the type of citizens we want to raise? Or is it going to have some far reaching effects that could ultimately result in a social decay and increased government intrusion in our daily lives to the point were the freedoms we enjoy now become a memory? While these questions can't be answered, nevertheless it is something to think about.

Having received physical custody of my oldest son at the time of my

divorce (despite the interference from the Oakland Friend of the Court which very, very rarely recommends physical custody to fathers) I can uniquely appreciate both sides of the custody issue. Instead of reducing fathers and in rare cases mothers to the role of "visitor" in their children's lives, they should be encouraged to do their natural and moral function — parent their children giving as much time and effort as they can. Children not only need both parents desperately; they deserve it.

Ronald Oliverio
Farmington Hills

Pay back taxpayers

I was intrigued with your headline in the Nov. 23 edition of your paper (Board seeks help in spending money). From the tone of the article one would get the impression that, magically, \$9.5 million had simply been given to the Farmington Hills school district.

Might I point out that this is not a zero sum windfall? This money is supposedly to make up for underfunding by the state for various mandated programs. The programs were not dropped, the money was spent. That money came from every-one of us taxpayers in this district.

The sensible solution seems to be — Let's Pay Ourselves Back!

Hopefully no one has forgotten a few months ago we passed a huge bond issue. We have voted to tax ourselves \$93 million to pay off this debt. Placing this "magical" \$9.5 million as the down payment on that debt service would seem a prudent thing to do.

Doesn't it irritate everyone of us to know that, left to themselves, we know the school board isn't going to make this one of the options they suggest? Let's make sure a lot of us suggest it to them.

Richard F. Stoe
Farmington Hills

POINTS OF VIEW

Trustee choice needs review

For decades, political insiders have been shaking their heads in wonder at Michigan's odd and virtually unique system of selecting members of major education boards.

By state constitutional mandate, candidates for the State Board of Education and for the boards of the Big Three universities — University of Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State — are nominated at party state conventions and elected statewide on the partisan ballot in November.

The usual result is that those so selected are virtually unknown and ignored by a news media preoccupied with other races. This lends a random quality to the outcome of elections, with winners generally riding on the coattails of Democratic or Republican candidates for governor or president.

That's too bad, because these boards, have a considerable impact on Michigan public policy and shouldn't be selected merely on somebody else's coattails. The State Board of Education, for instance, oversees the contentious charter school experiment, while the U-M Board of Regents is at the center of the far-reaching lawsuit challenging the university's practice of using affirmative action in admissions decisions in order to achieve a diverse student body.

This system has worked pretty well in practice. The key to making the process work has been sensible and far-sighted board members who, in advance of conventions, have recruited able candidates and worked to wire the conventions by selling their candidates to the party leaders and interest groups.

Sometimes the system doesn't work. Absent good early candidates and a pre-wired convention, there is an urge to play ticket balancing or interest group politics. The Republican Party has experienced considerable trouble with educational nominations, in part because the political litmus test required of all candidates by Right to Life, the predominant interest group in the GOP, is an unquestioned anti-abortion position.

Two years ago, for instance, Judy Frey, an experienced civic worker from Grand Rapids, was recruited by Gov. John Engler to run for the U-M board.



PHILIP POWER

Engler even gave her nominating speech. But Frey lost the nomination to Mike Bishop, an unknown lawyer from Rochester Hills whose main claim to fame was serving as president of his fraternity while an undergraduate at U-M.

The issue was abortion. Frey was pro-choice; Bishop, whose late entry into the race was orchestrated by Right to Life and the religious right, was pro-life.

Sen. John Schwarz, the leading legislative authority on higher education, is angry about it. Schwarz argues that it is "not only wrong but absolutely wrong" to choose university trustees solely on the bases of their ideology on abortion or the services they have rendered to powerful party interest groups.

Schwarz, who chairs the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on higher education, wants to do something about it. At a recent meeting of the Michigan Association of Governing Boards of State Universities, Schwarz proposed a 1 statute specifying primaries rather than conventions for nominating candidates for state university posts. Legislation could take immediate effect without amending the state Constitution.

Sen. Schwarz has performed an important service by bringing into focus an important aspect of the soft underbelly of Michigan politics. His ideas deserve a fair, robust hearing.

Phil Power, a member of the University of Michigan Board of Regents, is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network, Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (313) 953-2047, ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@online.com.

Political parallels connect adversaries Young, Patterson

Neither would probably acknowledge it. But there are striking similarities between Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and former Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, who died Saturday.

They never ran against each other, but they were contemporaries — although opposites politically. But Young, 79, and Patterson, 68, were intelligent, strong-willed individuals — fiercely committed to the people who elected them, loyal to friends and disdainful of enemies. To the delight of their respective audiences and the media, each knew the art of public speaking, capable of turning a phrase or skewering an opponent.

When asked if he saw any parallels between him and the former mayor of Detroit, Patterson responded: "God, I hope not." I never got the chance to ask Young the same question, but I suspect he would have reacted much the same.

But consider this: ■ Both had deep roots in Detroit, where much of their egos were shaped.

■ Both at one time attended Catholic schools. The University of Detroit High School — Patterson's alma mater — was one of three high schools that refused to grant Young an academic scholarship, even though

he had top grades coming out of St. Mary's elementary.

Young subsequently graduated from Eastern High School where he was second in his class. Patterson went on to the University of Detroit and the University of Detroit Law School.

■ Both were in the Army. Although he never attended college, Young was a second lieutenant during World War I and a Tuskegee Airman. Patterson was an enlisted man in the early 1960s, prior to law school.

■ Both men had distinguished careers before being elected chief executive of their political domains. Young was a delegate to Michigan's Constitutional Convention and he was elected to the State Senate in 1964. He was Democratic floor leader and subsequently the first black on the Democratic National Committee.

Patterson was Oakland County prosecutor for 15 years, earning a reputation for being tough on crime ... and welfare cheats.



PAT MURPHY

■ At the age of 54, Patterson became chief executive of one of the most wealthy counties in the United States in 1992, beating Betty Howe.

Young was 55, when elected mayor of Detroit in 1973, six years after the disastrous riot that accelerated the flight of whites and businesses to the suburbs.

Young did little to reverse that flight, and the loss of tax base which, coupled with the oil embargo and recession in the auto industry, made Detroit perhaps the most distressed city in North America.

■ Both were political heavyweights. Patterson — "Mr. Republican" in some circles — is frequently mentioned as a possible successor to Gov. John Engler. Should Engler make it to the White House, Patterson's access and clout could approach that enjoyed by Young under the Jimmy Carter administration.

■ Young and Patterson are sometimes regarded as racists, particularly by the other's constituency.

Young had fought for racial equality for blacks — something some whites, particularly those north of Eight Mile Road, saw as racist.

As a brash young prosecutor in the 1970s, Patterson was vehemently against school busing — something some blacks, particularly those south of Eight Mile, considered to be racist.

Young had 79 colorful years in which to make his mark. He won the love and admiration of some and the disdain and animosity of others.

Patterson rules Oakland County. But at 68, he's a work in progress. He too is loved and admired, and he too is disliked and sometimes misunderstood.

Both men will be remembered for a long time.

Pat Murphy, Oakland County reporter for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers, covered Young during his mayoral campaign in 1973 and L. Brooks Patterson as county executive.



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