

State of the state: Balancing rhetoric with reality

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

■ In the end it all boils down to this: Will you vote for it?

Part campaign document, part vision of the 21st Century, Gov. John Engler's 1998 state of the state speech shows him edging slightly toward the middle of the political road as he seeks a third term.

This year he mentioned several Democrats, including Sen. Joe Conroy of Flint, a champion of smaller class sizes. Twice he said "together," a word Jimmy Carter used in every sentence. Several times he said "teamwork," looking to his right (your left) at the Democratic side of the House.

Engler showed that he understood the "urban sprawl" issue by advocating redevelopment of brownfields rather than the paving over of farmland.

Here is what voters need to watch for:

1. Environmental bond issue on the November ballot. Engler is asking \$500 million — \$400 million for cleaning old industrial sites, \$50 million for state park improvements, \$50 million for clean water. Will the Legislature

amend it? Will two-thirds of the members of both chambers vote to put it on the ballot? Who will campaign for it? Will you vote yes or no?

2. Super-majority amendment. Engler dusted off an old anti-tax device, requiring a 60 percent vote in each chamber of the Legislature for any kind of increase in either a tax base or rate. Should taxes, alone, require such a super-majority? Will Democrats give him the votes to put it on the ballot?

Engler's text (cut from the TV speech you heard) mentioned six Republican senators, including Mike Bouchard of Birmingham and Loren Bennett of Canton, and nine Republican representatives, including Deborah Whyman of Canton, Andrew Raczowski of Farmington Hills, Greg Kaza of Rochester Hills and Alan Crosey of DeWitt. The fight to get it on the ballot may become partisan.

If it gets on the ballot, will you vote

yes or no?

3. Fees. Engler's budget for fiscal 1998 asked for \$80 million more in fees. He didn't mention fees in his annual message, just tax cuts.

4. Reading tests. Echoing President Clinton, Engler advocated testing pupils at the end of third grade for reading proficiency. Those who fail would have to attend summer school. That will cost money, especially since 51 percent of third graders now score less than proficient.

What part of the budget will be cut to obtain that money? What strain on the budget will his proposed across-the-board income tax cuts put? How will local school boards deal with the new state mandate?

5. Prisons. Far from being a break with the 1980s, Engler actually has continued James Blanchard's prison expansion. Blanchard tripled the prison system size (from 12,000 beds to 36,000).

Engler proposes 5,400 new prison beds. "Keep the crooks off our streets and out of our neighborhoods," he said, "by passing the (sentencing) guidelines out of the House." Will one of these prisons be near you? Will your city council or township board fight it tooth and nail?

"Tonight I propose we cut Michigan's income tax and cut it again... until the tax rate goes all the way down to 3.9 percent," he said. Then came the catch:

"The cuts begin in the year 2000, and when fully phased in, Michigan's income tax will be the lowest in a generation." Lawmakers cheered wildly.

To take effect in 2000, the tax cut would have to be passed in 1999. That will be in the next gubernatorial term. Many of the Senate seats will have turned over. Three-fifths of the present House members — at least — will be gone. That's what makes it a campaign speech rather than an agenda item.



Gov. John Engler

Generation gap rap

Gangsta rap, Acid Rock, Elvis, Sinatra, Boogie — the beat goes on, and back ...

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

God spoke to Gangsta-rap. And the much-criticized music genre spoke to God.

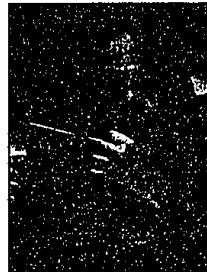
But the controversial juxtaposition didn't initially strike most of Oakland University's African-American students as one that could be pulled off, as they filled Varner Hall, on the Rochester Hills campus, to hear a noted intellectual speaker attempt to make the link.

The speaker, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, a Baptist minister, writer and scholar, spoke to students Thursday as part of the university's celebration of African-American month.

"I'm excited about the topic," said Latoya Smith, an African-American student at OU who was sitting near the front of the auditorium. "I don't like Gangsta-rap and I don't consider myself a religious person. I'm interested to hear what he has to say."

The topic also piqued the interest of Smith's friend, Kimberly Harper, another African-American student at OU. "The topic he is discussing is very controversial," said Harper, who considers herself a Christian and likes some Gangsta-rap, but doesn't regularly listen to the music genre.

Dubbed as "the ideal intellectual for our time" by virtue of his background — the Baptist minister and Princeton University scholar grew up poor in urban Detroit — Dyson roused and chal-



Taking note: Tracey McCoy, a freshman business student at Oakland University in Rochester Hills, reads from a book written by Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, who addressed an auditorium of students Thursday as part of the school's celebration of African-American month. McCoy attended the lecture.

lenged OU's students, with his words, comments and ideas.

Perhaps one of Dyson's most controversial points issued from his presentation and analysis of Gangsta-rap as art. Comparing the music genre to earlier generations of so-called controversial music — he gave Elvis Presley as

one example — Dyson said Gangsta-rap "has to do with the aesthetic alienation and moral monstrosity of this generation."

Although the music genre clearly has problems, he said, understanding its source and placing it into the context of art is a more sensible alternative to criticism and dismissal. Its use of derogatory language to characterize women and emphasis on violence is an expression of authentic social and cultural experience, he said. "The reality is that Notorious B.I.G. didn't start misogyny," Dyson said. "Let's be honest about our codes of ethics. ... God told you that women are supposed to be subservient to men," he said, referencing a Biblical passage.

But, Dyson, who held up some Gangsta-rap as "ingenious," "profound" and "lyrical," recognized that the music genre not only creates a divide between races but also sets up a division within the black community, particularly between parents and children, who disagree about the music's validity.

"But there are correlations between generations," Dyson said, recalling the days when he and his friends listened to the music of Motown despite their parents' protest. "Maybe there was more hope during the day of Smokey Robinson."

"I thought it was really moving," said Dwayne Moses, an 18-year-old, African-American student who attended the lecture. "There were things that he brought to light about older and

younger generations.

One of the Dyson's main points, which spoke to all races, was that the generation gap was a timeless phenomenon that required exploration and understanding by both parents and youth.

"And he broke it down to our level and then took it up to an intellectual level," Moses said. "He laid down a blueprint about what is happening (in the world)."

Celebrating African-American Month at Oakland University

Other events include:

■ Multicultural Food, Arts & Craft Show from 8 to 11 p.m., Monday, Feb. 2 at the Oakland Center

■ Black and White Role Reversal at 10 p.m., Monday, Feb. 9 in the Hamlin Lounge of the Oakland Center

■ Speech by Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer (Q & A and reception follows speech) at 2 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16 at the Meadow Brook Theatre

■ The 6th annual Keeper of the Dream Banquet, featuring Chrysler Corporation Chairman Robert J. Eaton, at 6 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 19 at Shotwell Gustafson.



Eloquent words: A Baptist minister, native Detroit and noted author and scholar, Dr. Michael Eric Dyson addresses students of all races at Oakland University during an African-American Month celebration program at the Rochester Hills college.

OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to Feb. 1.

BIRMINGHAM

Dream Cruise bash approved: Birmingham City Commission recently gave its support for an Aug. 14 charity event that would kick off the Woodward Dream Cruise and benefit the Oakland Children's Charity Coalition. A variety of children's organizations would benefit from the fund-raiser, which would be held at The Community House and atop two Birmingham parking structures.

FARMINGTON HILLS

Gambling raid: A total of 19 people were arrested in a joint sweep by uniformed and plain clothed police Jan. 25 in Farmington Hills. Officers impounded 11 vehicles, and confiscated \$25,000 in cash and three handguns.

INDEPENDENCE TOWNSHIP

Ice rink center proposed: A development proposal for a large indoor sports arena that would feature ice skating and in-line skating is expected to go to Independence Township officials in early February. The site would be located near Sasabaw Road and I-76 and include an Olympic-sized ice rink.

LAKE ORION

Anti-casino meeting posted: The Citizens Against the Auburn Hills Casino will meet at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 3 at the Lake Orion Village Hall, at 37 East Flint Street, to discuss the Bay Mills Tribe proposal to build a casino at I-76 and Joelyn Road. For additional information, call (248) 399-1597.

OXFORD

Stopping crime: Oxford has become the first North Oakland County community to join a host of others in fighting crime across governmental boundaries. Oxford recently joined Crime Stoppers of Michigan, which offers rewards to residents who

provide tips that lead to the arrest and conviction of criminals.

ROCHESTER

Brewery gets blessing: The Rochester City Council gave its blessing Jan. 28 for a microbrewery in downtown Rochester that would allow customers to make their own beer. The business person seeking to build the brewery still needs to obtain a microbrewer's license and have building renovations at the proposed brewery site completed.

SOUTHFIELD

New development at Eight Miller: A developer has offered the Southfield Downtown Development Authority \$1 million to purchase two, long-vacant Eight Mile properties — the former Specs Howard building and the Southfield Office Plaza. The site would be used for an 80,000-square-foot building and occupied by two national retailers. The developer reportedly would also donate \$110,000 for community development in Southfield.

TROY

School enrollment drops: The Troy School District recently reported the enrollment declined by 24 students this year. The decline is the first in 10 years for the district, which predicted significantly more students for the school year.

WEST BLOOMFIELD

Horse trails in question: Horses will not be allowed back on the trails at Marabank Park in West Bloomfield despite recent approval from the township board. Within two days of board approval, the township's Parks and Recreation Chairman informed the Township Supervisor that the Parks and Recreation Commission would disregard the action. Horseback riding had been allowed at Marabank Park for 13 months in trial program that ended last November.

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF WRITER

The distinct sound of glass breaking in the middle of the night prompts a startled homeowner to dial 911 for help. Through the local dispatch center and radio, a nearby police car is directed to the scene. But since dispatchers can't be certain of any police unit's exact location minute by minute, the closest police car isn't always the one that receives the radio call.

Some very powerful technology being implemented by Oakland County promises to radically improve this process and many others.

Commonly referred to as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the computer technology is best described as a network of automated maps that provides a variety of detailed, geo-spatial information.

As far as improving emergency response within the county, the technology would allow dispatchers to physically see and track every police vehicle on an automated computer map.

Dispatchers would also have immediate access to a map of the

caller's property and allow them to instantly establish the site's location and physical characteristics, like the existence of an alley behind the caller's home.

"That automates the entire process right there," said Robert Daddow, director of Oakland County's Department of Management and Budget and project director of GIS Oakland. "Police will immediately know where the unit is and those seconds can make a difference."

The automated map system, a multi-phase county project that has been under development since 1995, will also link every police department in the county. Dispatchers in West Bloomfield are attempting to get law enforcement to a residence that borders on Farmington Hills, for example, would have the ability to locate available police units from that police department.

Initial phases of the project will cost about \$6 million, some of which will be funded by state government. Also, Oakland County Government has teamed up with Lawrence Technological

University (LTU) in Southfield to nurture and promote GIS technology in southeastern Michigan. Their first annual GIS Technology Seminar was held Jan. 23 at LTU's College of Architecture and Design Auditorium and drew government officials from across the state.

But quickening emergency response time is only a single and "simple" example of the power of GIS technology, Daddow said.

Other uses afforded by GIS programs include visual maps of crime analysis, sewer and drainage systems, disease tracking and property assessment and valuation.

Once Oakland completes a base map of the county, the possibilities for providing quick access to information and useful visual representations is almost endless, Daddow said.

Currently, the county is completing a base map — a rough, geographical representation — of county property. About one-quarter of county land has been fixed and can be accessed within the automated system. Completion of the remaining 330,000

parcels of property is expected within 1998.

"There is a lot of preparation behind the scene to make this glitz happen," Daddow said of the time and work intensive project. "But we're on the edge. We're so far ahead on the cutting edge that people are going to look to us."

According to Daddow, Wayne County just recently began determining a strategy for installing property maps into an automated system.

The extent to which Oakland County will utilize the GIS technology to access information is also far ahead of the standard within Michigan, he said. "There isn't anything (planned) in Michigan that comes remotely close to what we're doing."

Another benefit: The system will give cities and townships within the county an opportunity to work jointly and facilitate the sharing of information, Daddow said. "There's a tremendous amount of duplicated effort that through this system we will be able to minimize or eliminate."

— Compiled by staff reporter
Nicola Stafford