

## Road rage

### We can only blame ourselves

**F**ifty-one-year-old Terence Salisbury of West Bloomfield died just before lunch Tuesday, Oct. 6, on I-275 near 10 Mile in Farmington Hills.

Police investigating his death have attributed Salisbury's death to what has become in our fast-paced, aggressive society commonly called "road rage." That's hardly a fitting epitaph for anyone.

And when we hear news of someone's unnecessary death on a highway because of uncontrolled, competitive anger, we're shocked.

Any number of people die on highways every day. Obviously what made this fatal accident significant was the attribution to road rage.

Despite our shock and revulsion, it's important to note that a day after Salisbury's death, the reckless actions of another motorist left Farmington Hills police in disbelief. Near the spot where Salisbury died, a motorist pulled out of traffic and drove at full speed on the right shoulder of northbound I-275 before cutting back into traffic.

This motorist was lucky enough to stay alive, but thankfully conducted his rage in view of police who ticketed him for reckless driving.

Part of what might make us all squirm about Salisbury's death is that we can understand the frustration, anxiety and plain anger experienced while driving in congested situations.

Today our roadways are plagued not only by major volumes of traffic — all moving at varying speeds — but plenty of delays due to the over-present construction that is marking our travels.

Driving today is exhausting. But that's no excuse for the behavior displayed by motorists, more often than not traveling at speeds in excess of 70 m.p.h. It's an opportu-

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Salisbury's death should make us all stop for a moment and make an assessment of our behaviors and motivations while driving.

We have turned driving into a competition. We compete for lanes. We compete to be the first at a traffic stop. We compete to be the first in a line of traffic — even when it's not going anywhere. Some motorists don't appear to know that a red light means stop. Few motorists balk as they scoot through the red, putting all others in jeopardy.

In being competitive on the road, we have transformed traveling into a game of one-upmanship, with little thought that we are driving machines weighing thousands of pounds and that injury and death come far too easily.

Our driving is a symptom of our fast-paced and aggressive lifestyles. The other guy is truly just that — just another human being who happens to be getting in our way and another human being from whom we are detached.

It is time to bring value back to our views of other people, including motorists. It is time that we are courteous and care that what we do in our vehicles can not only hurt, maim and kill ourselves, but others as well.

No one has forced our lifestyles and society to be fast-paced. No one is forcing us to live on the edge and without regard for others. We have done this to ourselves. And it's time to stop.

## Motorists face obstacles daily

**W**hen two drivers stage a reckless, aggressive battle over lane ownership on the I-275 freeway — leaving one dead — does the state bear any responsibility? The answer may not be as simple as you think.

The Observer can't excuse negligent actions of any driver. Neither can we demand that the state be held legally accountable when people willingly ignore the law. But we can and should try to understand the underlying reasons why "road rage" occurs — and one of those reasons is the overburdened — in some cases poorly-designed — freeway system in southeastern Michigan.

Redesigning freeways is costly and can take years. But maybe in the long run drivers would be better off if state officials began using some of last year's gas tax increase to pay for better entrance/exits ramps and merge lanes — not just smoother blacktop.

Consider these "obstacles" faced by law-abiding drivers everyday:

■ Entering southbound I-275 from M-5 in Farmington Hills, drivers must merge to their left within a few hundred yards or they will find themselves heading back on M-5 and Grand River.

■ Taking the eastbound I-96 ramp from southbound I-275, drivers seeking to exit at Newburgh Road in Livonia (the first exit), must cross over four lanes of eastbound freeway traffic in less than a mile.

■ The rural-like three miles between Ann Arbor Road (Plymouth/Livonia), Ford Road (Westland/Canton) and Michigan Avenue (Canton/Wayne) exits on northbound and southbound I-275 creates long back-ups during peak periods. The combined populations of these communities is a very unrural 300,000.

plus.

What's even more troubling is these examples are taken from a freeway designed and completed just 21 years ago, not some World War II-era transportation model. Engineers don't design freeways for minimum or maximum traffic loads, according to Robin Pannecouk, spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Transportation. They may have a broad range in mind, but there are no figures for what constitutes a "safe" number of commuters, particularly since the actual number varies on a daily and hourly basis, Pannecouk said.

Still, the fact that the most heavily trafficked stretches of I-275 are carrying more than three times the number of vehicles on a daily basis since the freeway opened in 1977 is alarming. According to MDOT figures for 1997 (the last year available), a high point of 190,000 vehicles traveled the freeway daily between the I-696 and I-96 interchanges. That compares to 57,000 passing through the I-96/M-14 interchange in 1977. At Ann Arbor Road, the daily traffic count was up to 79,000 from 50,000 in 1977. (Pannecouk said the 1977 figures are something of a misnomer since the public may not have been fully aware of the new freeway.)

When you add speed to the mix, you're increasing the "road rage" quotient. The passenger car limit on I-275 ranges from 65 to 70 mph; it was 55 mph when the freeway opened.

MDOT suggests that freeway commuters use common courtesy and remain aware of surrounding drivers when merging. Use turn signals and allow others to get into the traffic flow. Those are certainly good points. But updating freeway design should be part of the "road rage" solution too.

## Election: Be an informed voter

**N**ovember and the general election is gaining on us. It's right around the corner.

While we are busy talking with candidates and addressing the ballot issues that will face voters in November, we ask that as voters you take this upcoming election seriously.

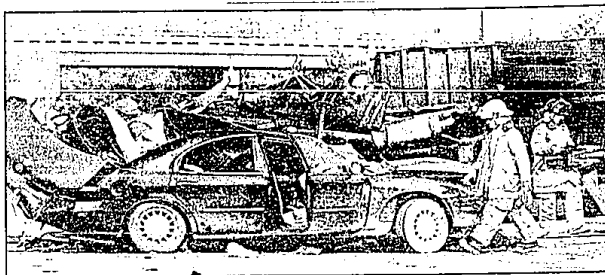
Take the time to read and learn about the candidates; consider the issues important to you; consider issues important to your community. Then make an informed decision. Not a hurried one. Not one based on name recognition. Ask yourself if the candidate you choose will adequately and appropriately represent you and your community in the state House, state Senate or Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

In such a busy world, it's easy to forget to vote, or to make it the last thing on your "to-do list." If you cannot be in town on Tuesday, Nov. 3, applying for an absentee ballot and voting it is as simple as registering to vote.

City clerks and their staffs in Farmington and Farmington Hills have worked hard to make the whole process of voting — from registering to voting — as simple and un cumbersome as possible. Take advantage of it.

If you don't vote and don't vote armed with knowledge, there's really no one to blame for the state of affairs but yourself. It's what you deserve.

## Death on I-275



Fatal: Road rage has been blamed in the death of Terence Salisbury, 51, of West Bloomfield on I-275 near 10 Mile in Farmington Hills.

## LETTERS

### How many should die?

**S**hould President Clinton order the bombing of Serbia to thwart human rights abuses? When our bombs kill people it is an American atrocity.

Is it fair to bomb the Balkans and ignore China, Ireland, and U.S. cities with histories of abuse?

Communist terrorism was expanding in Europe, Africa, South America and Cuba. All of Asia would fall like dominoes if Vietnam fell, so the Joint Chiefs of Staff drew the line. World War II survivors wanted no more holocausts or surrendering, and accepted the responsibility. When TV screens focused on American casualties the mood changed. Among the war's most unforgiving critics was Bill Clinton, who actively supported our Vietnam opponent in Moscow.

It is unforgivable that President Clinton would involve this country in a war to distract TV attention from his personal failings. How many must die to save this presidency?

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

### Silenced

**I**f you missed the PBS special on the fund-raising efforts of the Democrat and Republican parties, you should try to find out when it will air again. It was entitled "Washington's Other Scandal." From the presidential office to tax-exempt organizations' issue-related ads, it shows just how low politics has sunk.

If you are interested in details of the program and the fund-raising efforts, you should visit the PBS Web site at pbs.org. There are numerous links that give an enormous amount of detail on political contributions.

Wouldn't it be great if we could just ban PACs, lobbyists, soft money contributions, phony contributions to tax-exempt organizations that run "issue-related" ads, the use of union dues for direct or indirect political purposes and limit rich candidates from using their own money for political campaigns?

Until then, the system will not work and we can never be assured that the elected official is truly working in the best interest of her/his constituents.

We should also make it illegal for an attorney or law firm to contribute to the campaign of any individual running for any judicial office. Or better yet, ban the attorney or law firm from ever practicing before the judge if elected. And finally, isn't it ridiculous that "non-partisan" candidates for the state Supreme Court are nominated by the political parties?

It used to be the voice of the people that affected the political process. Unfortunately, that voice has been silenced and replaced by the sound of big money, big unions and deceptive practices.

Tom DeWard  
Farmington Hills

### Nothing to lose

**W**ith the elections coming up in November it seems very clear to me that if voters would set aside their hang-ups of voting along party lines and instead vote for the issues at hand, some very positive changes could be made in Michigan.

Yes, Geoffrey Fieger is flamboyant. And, yes, he has a record of saying what he thinks, which is politically incorrect. But he also has a record of getting things done, winning court cases fighting for the underdog. He stands up to government bureaucrats who seemingly have nothing better in mind than to try to look good by spouting off politically correct paragraphs and catch-phrases, but accomplishing nothing or next to nothing.

But isn't Michigan due to finally have a governor who wants to push aside all the politically correct garbage and excess baggage and cut to the chase, where the rubber meets the road?

Talk is cheap and so far all we've gotten from Gov. Engler is cheap talk and programs that do not work. He intimates all the good he has done, like cutting taxes, but that is just so much hogwash. Example: He constantly works his so-called tax cuts into his rhetoric. But he never mentions that he also raised Michigan sales taxes from 4 to 6 percent, which affects all of us more than all the other little tax cuts. Anybody could do that and it doesn't take an ounce of brains to do it.

Nothing he has proposed to better our school systems has better educated our kids. He has decimated government-sponsored mental health care, putting the mentally ill in jails instead of where they can receive treatment. He has decimated the Bureau of Automotive Regulation, the department that is supposed to protect us against vehicle repair rip-offs. The BAR is nearly running on empty, with only about 10 percent staff, no legislation to effectively enforce repair laws and 50 cases on a BAR investigator's desk at any given time, making at least a five-month bucking of cases.

Isn't it time to change these things? I believe that for our own good we should give Geoffrey Fieger a chance to show us what he can do. What do we have to lose? Status quo? In a one on one debate on the issues Fieger could crucify Engler.

Kenneth Kemp  
Farmington Hills

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Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

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— Philip Power