POINTS OF VIEW

Presidential candidates need to answer some tough questions

which are penaltical candidates George W. Bush, John McCain and the four ddwarves went at it Monday night in Grand Rapids.
The event kicked off in earnest the presidential primary season in Michigan. Republicans vote Feb. 22 in a primary election, while the Demberats gather in caucuses on March 11.
Presented with the opportunity to cover a big-time national story, the Michigan news media fell all over themselves in trying to cut do their national brethren in pontificating about the big questions. Can the charismatic insurthe big questions. Can the charismatic insur-gent McCain overcome all Bush's money and gent McCain overcome all Bushs money and institutional support from Gov. John Engler on down? Can Bush take a punch? Is Bush smart enough to know he's been hit? Is Michigan real-ly a Srewall for Bush in the event he loses the

ly a Srewall for Bush in the event he loses the primary in New Hampshire?
I'd add one. Is all we are doing merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?
Liok at it this way. We are plop in the middle of the greatest surge of technological change since the Industrial Revolution hit England in the 18th Capture. The Integrant is a present the 18th Century. The Internet is a present reality, and the enormous range and scope of future innovations stemming from the applica-tion of information technology are sure to bring fundamental changes to our entire society, from business to politics, from government to person-

Yet are these the questions the news media pose and the candidates debate? Perish the thought! Instead the political system contents itself with petty arguments about piddling subjects! Taxes (to cut or not to cut), subsidies to ethapol (of interest only to Iowa farmers), abortion (which is on the way down, anyway), family values (everybody, including Hillary, is running away from Clinton) and so on. Great political leaders have always had the

capacity to look over the horizon and to focus strention on the big issues that might not be so apparent at the time but which eventually shake the roots of societies. Ronald Reagan concentrated on Russia and the Cold War. Frankling Roosevelt reconstructed America in the wake of the Depression. Winston Churchill early saw the danger of Hitler.

I believe the next decade is going to be as revolutionary and creative as any period in Ameri-

And I think a presidential campaign that ignores these issues is a sad and wasteful exercise in futility.

Hère are just a few questions Michigan vot-

ers might want to raise in town meetings with esidential candidates.

These. E-commerce was the big winner this Christmas season. Most sales over the Internet are not taxed. But most states and some cities rely on some form of sales tax. What's going to happen when governors and mayors discover their tax base is being lost to untaxed Internet commerce? A national sales tax, almost certain



ly. This, in turn, will provoke a complete reset-ting of the relations between cities, states and the federal government. Safety net. Certainly, saving Social Security

Satety net. Certainly, saving social security is important, but in the age of the Internet, access to information technology is going to be as fundamental a need as a fixed income on retirement. Should everybody be guaranteed access to the Web as a right, just like Social

Security?

Education. The basic technologies of teaching and learning — lectures, note taking and reading — are all survivals of the Middle Ages. The Internet and information technology are open-ing the door for fundamental rethinking of the ways children and edults learn. We have yet to start talking about the consequences for our

entire system of education.
Government. A persistent problem in late
20th Century advanced countries is the ineffi-ciency of governments in delivering services to cency of government in derivering services at taxpayers, coupled with confusion about the proper responsibilities of our three-layered (local, state and federal) system of government. Why stand in line for hours to get your license renewed when you can get it done in sec-onds on the Internet?

Why rush to file your income tax return at midnight on April 15 when you can file instantaneously on the Web?

Politics. Citizens are increasingly cynical sout the political system; voter turnout is low about the political system; voter turnout is lov and getting lower Certainly, there is room for debate about the ways special interest money infests our politics. But could information tech-nology sweep aside the secret deals and revital-ize citizen involvement in the political process? Or will the Internet merely open the door for a scary sort of mobocracy?

I doubt well scripted sound bites or carefully programmed candidates will be able to handle these and other similarly far-reaching ques-

But they desperately need to be asked.

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Iva unfortunate, but bird feeding ordinance is necessary

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ber i severald commander his wife with-wife the serrogation.

Bed thing people lived in small groups, for the state of the third with the service of the bruly fit all the cars we drive on an eight-lane freeze drive and hour.

The simple and most basic truth about local ordinances is they're designed to help us shocking varying degrees of sanity end, jevels of tolarance into 36 square miles of sees.

sanity and trees of tournate into so square miles were out our differences amicably, we wouldn't need laws. Listen ing to the testimony Monday night gave me the impression that's just not going to happen any time soon. One young woman

One young woman testified that the association president in her neighborhood



has a "whitesta" against her family. Another told officials a neighbor wher received counties complaints about the ing pigeons, into grade harved about home because of the conflict.

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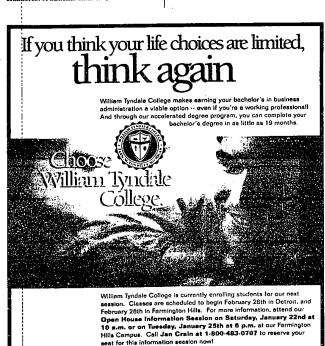
club of law.

As Mayor Nancy Bates pointed out, "All the education in the world won't help if you have uncooperative citizens.

Maybe the new bird feeding ordinance is ridiculous, Draconian, irresponsible, reactionary — all words used to describe it at Monday night's hearing. But it's also nec-

new York Governor George Pataki said t best: "When government takes responsi-bility for people, then people no longer take responsibility for themselves." Joni Hubred is a Farmington Observer

staff writer who covers the Farmington Hills City Council.



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