

Despite opposition, Million Mom March groups forge on

A year ago, Barb Case was on her way to Washington, D.C., to take part in the Million Mom March, perhaps the largest rally in the history of the Mall in that illustrious town.

When it was over, Case hoped the group could sustain its momentum. She needn't have worried.

Case is a Plymouth Township resident and one of the driving forces behind the Million Mom March movement for more sensible gun laws. She has watched the grass-roots organization

grow from eight members in the Western Metro Detroit chapter to more than 180, and to see 11 chapters form across Michigan and some 260 nationwide.

"It's been kind of a sense of empowerment, personally, for me," said Case. "I feel like I'm having an effect. The people I've met have been

incredibly bright men and women who have gotten involved. You can just sit back and moan, but it's nice to know you can have an effect."

Arguments can be made about how effective the MMM has been, but it's a group that would be pretty tough to ignore. They've staged massive rallies at the capitol. They've held parades and other events to draw attention to their cause.

On Tuesday, they won a small battle in the way they're waging the state legislative fight in which in a lame-duck session last year passed concealed weapons legislation the MMM thinks is dangerous. In conjunction with another grass-roots group, People Who Care About Kids, the MMM helped snag 260,000 signatures in an effort to put a referendum on the CCW law on the ballot. The Board of Elections certified 88 percent of the signatures, but the Board of Canvassers Tuesday voided the petition.

Unfortunately from the MMM's point of view, that doesn't necessarily mean the referendum will hit the ballot. In what Case calls a blatant attempt to avoid a vote of the people, legislators tacked an appropriation to the law, making it immune to referendum. The issue is currently in court, and Case expects it to go to the state Supreme Court before it's over.

"The Court of Appeals has until June 1, and we expect a decision in our favor," said Case. "But even if it does, the other side isn't going to stop there. This is going to the Supreme Court, no question about it."

And the Board of Canvassers was no help.

Despite the 88 percent signature validation, canvassers split, 2-2 along party lines, and declined to certify it for election, opting to let the Court of Appeals hash it out.

Like any group on either side of a political issue, particularly one this hot, the MMM has gotten strong political support from (mostly Democrat) allies, and stern (mostly Republican) objection and rejection from others. U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, who was in the House of Representatives when the MMM started last year, have been ardent supporters.

According to Case, state Rep. Pan Godchaux, a Republican from Birmingham who voted against the CCW legislation, is an avid supporter. Not all quarters give MMM the same credit, however. State Sen. Thaddeus McCotter, R-Livonia, has been one of the most vocal supporters of the CCW legislation, which naturally puts him at odds with MMM. Unfortunately, we couldn't reach Sen. McCotter for comment, which should come as no surprise to Case, who said the MMM has gotten that kind of response from a lot of politicians.

"It's frustrating when you're shouting and feel like no one is listening," Case said. "It's frustrating when you contact legislators and it's like hitting a brick wall. We've spent a lot of time talking to aides."

Despite the opposition, the group charges on. Last weekend, it marked the anniversary of the march, which drew 750,000 "mothers and others" to the Mall in Washington, D.C. There was no such demonstration this year, with the MMM opting instead to concentrate on smaller, more local observances, including services at a Baptist church in Ferndale and a Catholic church in Grosse Pointe Park, along with a candlelight vigil in Novi.

McCotter has been a problem all along. "We have lots of plans and ideas, but they all take cash," Case says — but the group plugs along anyway. A large part of the focus this year will be raising money. And while the group looks forward, it doesn't hurt to revel in what it has accomplished. Case points out that there are now about 260 chapters nationwide, and marches were conducted at capitols in 38 states over the last year.

"I think the fact we can hook up with People Who Care About Kids and pull in 60,000 signatures shows we can be a major player," Case said. "We're not going anywhere."

If you had asked Case 18 months ago whether she would help change the world, she probably would have shrugged and wondered the same thing.

Eighteen months later, she knows.

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Mike Malott

Jaye hearings hold political liability for McCotter, senate

Should those who break the law be allowed to make laws that the rest of us are expected to follow?

If you find that idea offensive, as do I, you've got a lot of good company in the Michigan Senate these days.

According to state Sen. Thaddeus McCotter, R-Livonia, that's the basic question at issue in the hearings regarding the proposed expulsion of Sen. David Jaye, R-Washington Township.

Charges may have been dropped Monday in Florida that the senator hit his fiancée there in April, but there remains a litany of allegations against the conservative Republican lawmaker. Among them is another domestic violence incident in Bay County from last November in which the charge is still pending. Witnesses have told the senate committee they saw Jaye strike his fiancée in that case.

Of course, Jaye also has several drunk driving convictions on his record. Now add to that allegations of verbal abuse of senate staffers and the charge he kept copies of photographs of his fiancée topless on his state-owned computer.

In Macomb County, the prosecutor still plans to take Jaye to task for violating his probation as a result of the Florida incident. And senators are convinced Jaye did indeed abuse his fiancée in that incident, despite the dropping of the charge there, so they are saying they will keep the allegation in their resolution for expulsion.

But if Jaye is under siege, he certainly has not hesitated to return fire. And many of his shots have been aimed directly at his Republican brother who is co-chairing the select committee examining his qualifications to hold office — Sen. McCotter.

According to Jaye and his attorneys, McCotter is violating Jaye's right to due process, and even the American Civil Liberties Union has joined in with that allegation. McCotter has a hidden agenda, a political agenda, according to Jaye's representatives. The senate wants to get rid of Jaye because of his staunchly conservative views, so the counter-charges go.

"I have no animus against Jaye. I agree with him on all the fundamental conservative issues. This is not about his political agenda," McCotter insisted. "Let me ask you this. He's a recognized conservative. We share conservative issues — profile, pre-second amendment, anti-affirmative action, blah, blah, blah. If I were to run in a primary, and he has admirers throughout the state

because of his advocacy of these issues, is that going to help me to splinter my conservative base in the next upcoming primary? How does that help me? ... Do you think Carl Pursell (former Republican representative from Plymouth) would have advised me to do this if I wanted to

The state constitution clearly gives the senate the power to police its own membership.

get to Congress?"

One of Jaye's most frequent complaints has been that the committee won't let him produce character witnesses, people who could testify as to how hard he has worked for his district. And McCotter has been the toughest on the issue.

He repeatedly cited committee rules that require any testimony to be relevant. Jaye contends that how well he represents his district is relevant. McCotter disagrees.

"That would be like letting a defendant in a bank robbery case produce character witnesses," McCotter explained. "He may be a very nice guy when he isn't robbing banks, but it has nothing to do with the incident."

Jaye, of course, has threatened to sue if the senate votes to oust him. That may happen, McCotter said, but it is unlikely to get very far. The state constitution clearly gives the senate the power to police its own membership, he said. And separation of powers is likely to keep the courts from intervening.

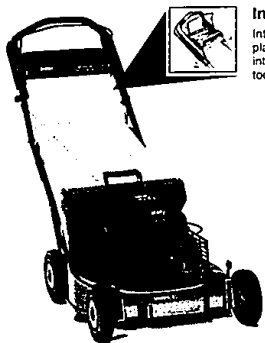
But even if senators do decide to remove Jaye, that is not a plus for anyone in the legislature's upper chamber. There won't be any congratulations or slaps on the back, McCotter insisted.

"If you think about it, this is an admission of failure that we couldn't control him," he explained. "It's not, 'We hate David.' We would be the first senate in 164 years not to be able to prevent it coming to this."

Mike Malott reports on the local implications of state and regional events. He can be reached by phone at (248) 634-8219 or by e-mail at mmalott@homecomm.net.

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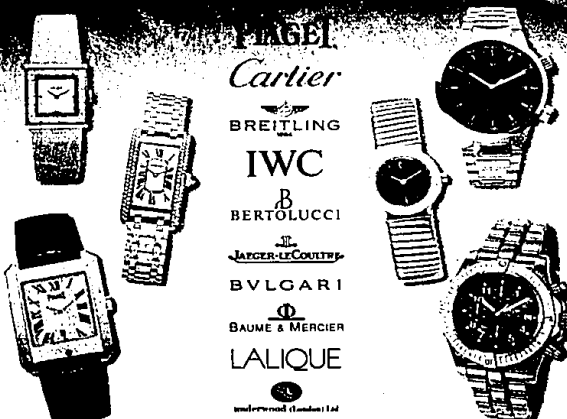
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