

## Idea of visiting committee has merit for U-M Regents

'Tis the season, and just in time for the New Year, they're changing the guard at the University of Michigan.

Leaving for the presidency of Columbia University is Leo Bollinger, who was a popular and visionary leader at the U-M during his relatively short tenure. Arriving as interim president is B. Joseph White, the respected former dean of the Business School.



Phil Power

Bollinger's departure from the U-M has been the subject of intense speculation, some having to do with his compensation (substantially less than the football coach Lloyd Carr) and some having to do with the workings and personalities on the eight-member Board of Regents. Bollinger has been giving end-of-term interviews to various newspapers, not directly criticizing the board but suggesting it could benefit from additional perspective to do its job better, perhaps through a visiting committee made up of alumni and other friends and donors to the University.

In an interview published last week in the Ann Arbor News, Bollinger said, "Every great institution has people other than the formal governing board who devote a good segment of their lives and their energies to the success of their institution, and who bring to those discussions very special talents and capacities. We do not have that."

He suggested the essentially political process that produces the governing boards of the Michigan's Big Three universities may not always produce the best boards to govern universities.

"If you tried to run this university like a department of transportation or a business, it would be a disaster. ... These are fragile places, with a very distinctive culture and atmosphere. ... A sense of some disconnection from the pressures of political and commercial problems is essential," said Bollinger.

For years, many have argued that the odd way we select members of university governing boards in Michigan could stand improvement. Most voters have no idea of the qualifications and positions of candidates.

As a result, who gets elected is essentially a crapshoot. Perhaps that's why very few other

states elect members of their university boards.

Gov. Engler says he wants to appoint board members, perhaps subject to confirmation. Sen. John Schwarz says a better system would be to add seven appointed members to the eight-member elected boards, thereby producing a hybrid board of 15. In either case, changing the way boards are selected in Michigan would require amending the Constitution, not an easy matter.

So maybe Bollinger's idea of an advisory visiting committee has some merit. I saw a version work well while I served as a Regent. Farris Womack, then the financial vice president of the University, created an investment advisory committee to advise him in managing the U-M's

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portfolio, stocking it with business and investment insights.

The advisory board had two purposes. One was to advise the vice president about investments. The other was to educate individual members of the board about the complexities of financial and investment strategy.

Everything worthwhile has a hidden agenda, of course. And the hidden agenda in this case was to intimidate into silence one particularly obtuse and unknowing regent who had a long history of trying to micromanage investment decisions. Watching Al Taubman bluntly tell this guy he didn't know what he was talking about is one of my happiest memories of my time as a Regent. And, surprise! - pretty soon that regent quit messing with investment decisions.

The people who serve as U-M regents put in an enormous amount of unpaid time and effort for the University, and they never get much credit for all their work and caring. Most of them, in my experience, have been unusually able and dedicated men and women. But like any other small board - especially one that is the product of the political system - they need all the help and advice they can get.

Obviously, the regents won't want to dilute their responsibilities in governing the University. But having available to them a group of experienced people who also care deeply for the U-M might give them some valuable perspective and balance.

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Paul Beaudry

## Parents out of touch over ho-ho-hopeless bus-radio battle

A couple of weeks ago, the golf course I frequent had a Christmas party for the children of the surrounding subdivision.

The party went fine, other than the fact that Santa could have been a little crisper. Not that the surrogate St. Nick was boozed up or dressed in green, but his suit was a little tattered and everything else was rough around the edges. In other words, Edmund Gwenn in *Miracle on 34th St.*, he wasn't.

A few days later, the owners of the course got a call from a parent whose 10-year-old child attended the party. The parent explained that their child was currently in that age of confusion about Santa's existence and that the party's Ratty Ol' St. Nick confused the kid even more.

The parent vented for another 10 minutes and concluded by blaming the course owner - trying to be a nice neighbor by having a party for the neighborhood kids - for adding to their child's confusion.

Until last Thursday, I thought this the singular most oblivious-to-the-rest-of-the-world act by an over-protective, over-coddling parent.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a new winner.

The new award goes to the group of Farmington parents who want the district's school bus drivers banned from listening to the radio, while they get paid next to nothing for carting their pampered little tykes to and from school every day. (Guess you've pretty much figured out which side of this fence I'm on.)

For the uninformed, there are two factions of parents on the same side of this fight.

One just wants to be sure that bus drivers be a little more cognizant of what they are listening to with the tykes around.

And while I'm against censorship, that group has a point. I wouldn't exactly want my 7-year-old listening to the stultified humor of WRIF's Drew and Mike in the morning. It's bad enough that I listen to it. Nor would I want them listening to rap lyrics like "First, we gonna \*\*\$% all the \$%\*#\$, then \$%\*(3\$&\$, then take the \$%\*#\$, then have lunch."

It is the other, more militant group that wins the award for trying to bully their desires on the less-vocal majority.

This group wants no music, no news, no sound, no how on any of the buses. It's kinda like the Taliban, except they dress better and drive more expensive vehicles.

One parent complained about that well-known offensive patter on National Public Radio, since NPR had the temerity to broadcast terrorist information. ("Mommy, guess what I learned on the bus today? I learned how to adapt the principles of a Daisy Cutter bomb to the engine block of Daddy's Beemer!")

They object to listening to Jim Harper and his morning crew - which under normal circumstances would earn them applause for having good taste - but if there is any more easy listening, pump-the-sugar-right-into-my-veins, unobjectionable programming, it would be that.

And one parent said that her children are allowed to only listen to classical music or children's music and never allowed to listen to rock and roll. (And now, we bring you another golden oldie - Rachmaninoff's version of "Do You Know the Muffin Man?")

Hey, people. Allow me to introduce you to two new concepts - reality and diversity.

Give the bus drivers some credit. Unlike some parents (and yes, many of the drivers also wear that hat), they can be entirely capable of realizing what is and isn't appropriate for a group of children. A lot of them even have common sense, which puts them one up on these parents.

Life is a classroom, not a cocoon. You want to shelter your kids from drug dealers, from robbers - I'm right there to help. You want to keep your kids from watching MTV, VH1, BET, CMT or any other music video station at home, go ahead.

You want to bully others because you choose to keep your children's head in the sand until they turn 35, I have a problem with that. The people carting your kids around are just looking for a little peace of mind while dealing with your angels yelling, screaming, fighting and playing.

Believe it or not, there is a whole new world outside the front door. Learning new things is why most parents send their children to school in the first place. Learning doesn't end in the walls of the school. Learning is interaction with people, with places, with sounds and smells. And yes, part of learning is dealing and responding to the bad and the good.

The smart parents know that and teach their children accordingly.

The others probably won't change, no matter how the rest of us ho-ho-hope they do.

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