

Gubernatorial candidates should learn from Engler

Both nominees for governor — Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus for the GOP and Atty. Gen. Jennifer Granholm for the Dems — would be well advised to watch a master at work last week.

Gov. John Engler began by vetoing \$845 million in revenue sharing money appropriated for police and fire protection, garbage pickup and other services in local communities across Michigan. He argued that three proposals on the November ballot would, if passed, blow a huge hole in an already tenuous state budget.

Predictably, all hell broke loose. Local government folks screamed they had constructed their budgets based on the assumption of revenue sharing bucks from the state. A big rally was held on the Capitol grounds, replete with fire-eating speeches from local officials delivered to an audience of fire fighters and police.

Republicans, already grumpy at having passed a cigarette tax as part of a budget compromise that preserved revenue sharing money, charged the Governor. Gov. Engler, however, merely said the veto proved Engler didn't care about ordinary people in their own hometowns.

When the vote to override the veto came, the results were fairly dramatic: Only one vote each in Senate and House — out of 143 votes cast — to sustain the Governor. Gov. Engler, Democrats dubbed Engler, who has a little more than four months left in his term, a lame duck. Frowning, Republicans said that the legislature, having overturned the first gubernatorial veto since Bill Milliken's day, would find it easier the next time.

But was it really that big a defeat for Engler? It ain't necessarily so. By provoking a firestorm over his veto, he actually woke up a dozing press corps to focus attention on the three November ballot proposals he says could destroy a state budget already held together with chewing gum.

■ Earmark for health care most of Michigan's share of the tobacco settlement money. Backed by the hospital and health care lobby, the measure, if passed, would grab money now being spent on college scholarships for high school graduates and on the high tech Life Sciences Corridor program.

■ Eliminate mandatory minimum prison sentences for some drug dealers and require the state to spend \$18 million annually for rehabilitation programs for offenders. While

this probably would save money long term — warehousing felons costs around \$35,000 per year per inmate, certainly more than rehab programs — it risks looking like it encourages softness on drug peddlers.

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■ Require collective bargaining and binding arbitration for state employees. Not surprisingly, the measure is the creature of the state's business unions. State budget officials say it would cost \$500 million over the next three years.

Engler didn't sound too upset at the veto override: "While I am disappointed in today's legislative decision to override my veto, I am pleased that opposition to the three budget-busting ballot proposals continues to grow. If the ballot proposals pass, revenue sharing is absolutely up for revisiting."

In other words, Engler was perfectly prepared to trade a little lost prestige in the short run for vastly increased attention to the ballot proposals in November. Not only that, but he put most local government officials on notice that continued flow of their revenue sharing goodies depends on defeating the proposals this fall.

That's not a bad trade. And it's perfectly consistent with Engler's political m.o. He's always been quite content to reach through the tactical huffing and puffing to achieve his ultimate strategic purposes. It's one of the reasons he's been an effective governor.

And it's something both Posthumus and Granholm will need to learn if they're doing to be anywhere near as effective as Engler has been.

Phil Power is the Chairman of the Board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column at (734) 953-2206 or at power@homecomm.net.



Disparate events show more than one way home

Bill Bresler

One of the best and worst parts about this job is that strangers let you into their lives and share their triumphs and tragedies. It's both a privilege and a burden and engenders a responsibility I don't take lightly.

The down side is that this job can feed my cynicism. For every story about people rising to an occasion there is another story about the mean-spirited, the dishonest and the cruel. I admit it, one of the sources of my cynicism is organized religion. For all of religion's good intentions, most faiths have used their beliefs to harm or at the very least, exclude people of different faiths. "In the name of God" is an excuse to perpetrate all kinds of evil, by people who claim to know God's intent.

I steer clear of organizations, religious or otherwise, that claim to be the one true anything. No one person or one religion has all of the answers. Everyone, regardless of faith, probably has a part of the answer. I'm reminded of a friend, an inactive Catholic priest now a professor at Schoolcraft College who commented that one of the most Christian people he knew considered himself an atheist.

You may call me a crank, but any organization run by human beings is bound to mess up. That's because we are all, well, human.

Last Sunday morning brought two very different assignments. The Jain community in Farmington Hills was celebrating the installation of the Twenty-four Tirthankars or Jain Gods in their temple.

A couple of miles south, Adam Cardinal Malda joined the parishoners at St. Clare of Assisi to help celebrate the extensive renovation of their building.

Many hundreds of Jains dressed in traditional Indian garb marched in a colorful procession. The parade began at Mercy High School. (Is this a great country, or what?) moved north on Middlebelt and east to the temple. Jain religious leaders traveled from India to ride in top-down convertibles and a horse-drawn carriage, much like local politicians in the Founders Festival parade.

People danced to music played by musicians riding in the backs of pickup trucks. Banners and balloons flew in the breeze. There on the side of the road stood Karen Boken, chair of the Multicultural/Multiracial Commission. I spotted Paul and Lee Blizman marching with the crowd.

I had plenty to photograph. The joyous marchers, from kids to grandparents, were happy to explain to this white, middle-aged bald guy covered with cameras exactly what the significance was of whatever I photographed.

Walking back to my car I overheard Farmington Hills Police Officer Mike Pluhart

talking to a motorist stopped by the parade. He was doing a pretty good job of explaining what the Jain religion was all about.

At St. Clare of Assisi Cardinal Malda joined Father Fred Klettner in saying Mass. Father Fred and others told funny stories about the experience of renovating their older building. Though the stories brought laughter, there was no mistaking that the project took a tremendous collective effort, effort that the parishioners willingly gave to help their church grow. The congregation gave thanks for everyone's sacrifices, from the design architect to the family that made two hundred egg rolls for the afternoon celebration.

A little guy sitting next to his Dad and Mom was pretty antsy during the service, but when Cardinal Malda walked by the boy quickly understood that the guy in the tall hat was someone special.

The youngster stood up to shake hands with the Cardinal. Later in the afternoon, unwinding with a cup of the usual at Starlucks, I read over my notes and thought about other faith experiences during the past year.

I thought of this community's response to the tragedy of 9/11. People of all faiths gathered at Nardin Park United Methodist for an emotional memorial service. The folks over at the Universalist/Unitarian community put up a display reminding us that peace, not revenge, was the higher goal.

I thought of wearing a yarmulke at the funeral of an old college friend who just happened to be raised a Christian.

I thought of removing my shoes and joining a Muslim holiday celebration at the Tawheed Center.

There are some very common threads in these stories.

People of faith gathered together. There was a bit of laughter or at least a smile at even the most somber event. Parents, relatives or sometimes just acquaintances picked up small children and gave them hugs and kisses.

I never heard a harsh word. What I saw was that folk of widely disparate cultures have plenty in common.

Maybe we can overcome our self-imposed barriers. It can start here.

I'll probably never join any specific church and start wearing a particular label. I'm too contrary, I guess. After nearly 25 years in this business, my experience tells me that there is one truth.

There's more than one way home.

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