

Want to see priorities? look at the budget

If you want to know what a politician's real priorities are, forget the window dressing contained in the State of the (you fill in the blank) Speech. Instead, look to the budget when it's finally submitted.

Gov. John Engler provides an instructive example.

In his widely praised State of the State speech at the end of January, the governor made education his top priority, arguing that Michigan had to be a "smart state" to succeed in the economic competition of the future and proposing all manner of innovations in education.

His budget, unveiled last week, had a distinctly different emphasis. In it, Engler recommended giving state prisons a budget hike nearly four times bigger than the one for public universities.

Engler called on the Legislature to increase appropriations to the Department of Corrections by \$110 million, more than 8 percent, much of the money going to open 4,712 new prison beds. Fifteen public universities would be guaranteed increases of \$24 million - a 1.5 percent increase - while another seven schools would divvy up an extra \$14 million from a new funding formula.

If adopted, Engler's proposed budget would put total state spending on prisons at nearly \$1.57 billion, nearly equal to the \$1.63 billion he wants to spend on higher education. If past priorities are any guide to the future, the Engler budget for 2000 will be the first in Michigan history to spend more money to warehouse criminals than to educate young people.

I don't get it. Or, more accurately, I didn't get it until I read a series of articles recently

Phil Power



published in the Atlantic Monthly magazine written by Eric Schlosser.

Taking his text from the famous warning about the "military-industrial complex" in President Eisenhower's 1961 farewell address, Schlosser suggests the real reason behind the enormous increase in prison spending nationwide is the workings of the "prison-industrial complex - a set of bureaucratic, political and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need." Not a conspiracy, the prison-industrial complex is "a confluence of special interests that has given prison construction in the United States a seemingly unstoppable momentum."

Schlosser cites these components:

- Politicians, both liberal and conservative, who regularly pander to a public fearful of crime by voting for new prisons. If you can get them to stand still for a moment, ask your state representative and senator under what circumstances they would vote against

prison construction and staffing and for more money for colleges and universities. Don't hold your breath.

- Poor rural areas, where prisons have become the main engine of economic growth. There are legislators from northern Michigan and the UP who never met a prison they - and their unemployed constituents - didn't like.

- Private companies riding the current fad for privatization, that regard the \$1.57 billion spent in Michigan on prisons not as a burden on our taxes but as a lucrative market.

- State government bureaucrats, in charge of ever-increasing pots of money and power. The data are clear. Nationwide since 1991, the rate of violent crime in America has fallen by about 20 percent, while the number of people in prison has risen by 50 percent.

The logic is unstoppable. If crime is going up, we need to build more prisons. But if crime is going down, it's because we have built more prisons. And, most certainly, building yet more prisons will drive the crime rate down even more.

When the Legislature finally passes the Engler budget, you'll see that growth in state spending on prisons easily will surpass spending on colleges and universities. You may not like it, but at least you'll understand why.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@online.com.

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Letters to the Editor

Your (alcohol) article has tarnished a business

To the editor:
I guess you could say that I am part of the "silent majority" as I read the paper, listen to the news, and keep my feelings to myself.

After reading your article, No "Minor Offense," I had to leave the silent majority and speak my piece.

Your article has tarnished a business that I frequent on an almost daily basis. During my visits to the Cap N Cork I have observed numerous occasions where people are asked for ID when they attempt to purchase alcohol or cigarettes.

I have also observed numerous letters from our public safety director commending them for their diligence in not selling these types of products to minors in other sting operations.

There was no mention of this in any area of your article. Instead your writer left the impression that this business has a history of selling to minors.

I would be willing to bet that your writer never set foot in the Cap N Cork to ask their side of the story before he sat down and wrote this one-sided article. I would hope that this is not how all of the stories in your paper are written.

I am not saying that the sale was correct, as we all know it is not. But what I am saying is that if the people quoted in your article have never had an employee make a mistake or if they themselves have never erred then they would be entitled to voice their opinion as strongly as they did.

To use their position to get a public forum and smear a business, and the owners of that business, is not the way I would like to see our public officials act. I would bet that they have all done things that, looking back on, they wish they could have done differently.

There was a mention that Arbor Drugs was not notorious for selling to minors yet no mention of any other establishments.

The chart printed along side the article showed that Arbor has been cited twice in a 12-month period where the Cap N Cork has been cited twice in 42 months.

I would assume that the same type of endorsement should have been given to the Cap N Cork.

Dale W. Paquette

City's tactics are disappointing

To the editor:
I've lived in the city of Plymouth for about 56 years. I visit and shop in the Northville area because of what both our communities stand for. However, I was very disappointed when I read the article written by Andrew Dietrich with regards to the method Northville is using to trap different business establishments.

It appears that the fine city of Northville is no longer interested in working with people to better their community. The Youth Forum group should better use their efforts to working with the community business owners in a truly sincere effort to prevent such unfortunate actions as indicated in your paper. I have patronized the Cap N Cork establishment for many years and have been fortunate to know the owners quite well. By no means do they condone what recently happened and will take whatever additional steps to prevent this from happening again. I believe in the interest of your paper, along with the rest of your community, a follow-up with those accused and what actions they are taking would be well received by all of us. I truly believe by working together is more beneficial than the tactics now being used by the city.

Dave Palmer

Outdoor cafe is enjoyable

To the editor:
In response to your article where Northville resident Beth Beson and a city council member expressed concern over Poole's Tavern, I must say we couldn't disagree more with her point of view. My wife and I and our one-year-old son had dinner there several times this past summer, always opting to eat outside because of the wonderful atmosphere. We couldn't help but notice the many other families that dine there with their small children. Poole's seems to have a family atmosphere.

If Ms. Beson doesn't want to see people drinking then perhaps she should change her route. She should also avoid walking past

Mackinnon's because one can view the people drinking inside. Maybe we should make Mackinnon's move their tables away from the front windows so people walking by can't see those patrons sipping a glass of wine either.

Outside of fastfood chains, what restaurant doesn't serve alcoholic beverages? Shielding our children from the view of people enjoying alcoholic beverages will not teach them to drink responsibly. Parents educating their children about alcohol will.

Doug and Patti Lewandowski

Police item smacks of racism

To the editor:
I am surprised and offended that my hometown paper, The Northville Record, reported the race of a person who was apprehended at a local store. The race of no other suspects was mentioned in "police news" on Feb. 11. Is this The Record's feeble racist attempt at tabloid journalism, or is racism alive and shouting in our town?

Marshall Blondy M.D.

Religion should be dealt with openly

To the editor:
There are some subjects that for one reason or another we do not wish to deal with openly. As an octogenarian, I feel free to bring up the subject of religion.

I've often been asked which, if any, religion I subscribe to and why. I can only report on what I have come across in my continuing search for an answer to what I've come to believe to be unanswerable. In Churchill's words, Religion is a "riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." In short, what do we mean when we say that we believe in "God?"

Rabbi Richard Hirsch once wrote, "...if we conceive of 'God' as, for example, a power or force with in Creation which makes for justice, freedom, when we show kindness, and when we display courage, then we can be said to believe in 'God'."

George Santayana, philosopher, writer, critic, writes, "God" is not the name of an actual being or reality. It is a name for the highest

ideal of man. It is a symbol for perfect truth, beauty, and goodness, for the ideal of happiness."

Thomas Kirk of Detroit wrote, "Some find a world without divine significance 'terrifying,' but I find it exhilarating and liberating. The absence of divine purpose does not mean that nothing matters, but only that we are free to define what does matter. A desperate search for cosmic significance reveals a disturbing disregard for the importance of human existence, and a fear of facing the unpleasant reality of one's mortality. If one is afraid of taking responsibility for living the real world, he will no doubt find, in philosophy or religion, a comforting illusion."

For myself, I have worked out a simplified, rational conception of "God": "God" is the collective, compassionate and caring conscience of humankind

Alfred P. Galli

'Odyssey' judges deserve thanks

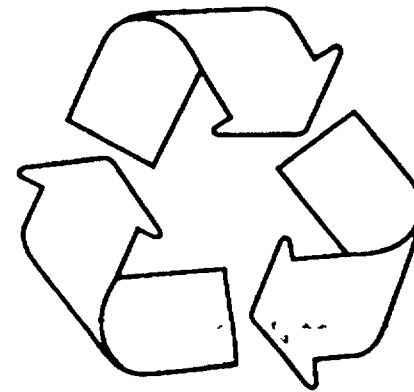
To the editor:
On behalf of the Northville Odyssey of the Mind students, coaches and parents, I would like to thank the following Northville High School National Honor Society members who acted as judges for our recent Spontaneous Workshop and Mock competitions: Martin Lenardon, Aron Grajek, Margaret Myers, Adam Melvin, Brad Wilhelm, Aditya Prasad, Dave Handley, Sarah Matusz, Alex Lucas, Peter Law, David Whitbeck, Scott Whitbeck, Steve Yutz, Andy Leeds, Amanda Halash, Angle Mathews, Jenny Llewellyn, Clark Kirkman, Dan Michalik, Mindy Marburger and Shalene Jha

Through the efforts of these students each of our ten Odyssey of the Mind teams was able to participate in 15 verbal and hands-on activities as well as perform their long-term problem. These evenings were very beneficial in preparing our teams for the up-coming March 6 Regional Competition in Grosse Pointe. Throughout each of these evenings, I received many compliments as to how kind and helpful these high school students were and what fine examples they set for our youngsters.

Again, thanks. We couldn't have run these two successful evenings without your help

Judy Handley

Now is the time to think about the future generation



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This newspaper welcomes letters to the editor. We ask, however, that they be issue-oriented, limited to 400 words and that they contain the signature, address, and telephone number of the writer. The writer's name may be withheld from publication if the writer fears bodily harm, severe persecution, or the loss of his or her job. The writer requesting anonymity must explain his or her circumstances. Submit letters for consideration by 4 pm Monday for that Thursday's paper. We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity, clarity, libel, taste and relevance. This policy is an attempt to be fair to all concerned.

Submit letters to: Editor, The Northville Record, 104 W. Main, Northville, MI 48167

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