

Kalamazoo County Democrat

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FOCUS

Despite Littleton, Michigan Legislators Want More Guns on the Streets Opponents Threaten Referendum in 2000

Gun rights advocates across the country suffered setbacks after the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, as one state legislature after another—including Colorado’s—dropped bills that would have

made it easier for many more citizens to carry concealed weapons. Some, like California, seized the opportunity to pass stricter laws. The U.S. Senate even managed to pass modest gun control legislation. But Michigan continues to

swim against the tide, despite the chaos left in Littleton’s wake, including widespread copycat incidents involving Michigan schoolchildren. Some of those incidents closed several Michigan schools for days at a time.

“Concealed Guns” continued on page 4

New County Chair Emphasizes Building Community Outlines Direction in Speech before Democrats

The following are excerpts from a speech given by County Chair Olga Bonfiglio on May 27 at the regular Fourth Thursday meeting of Democrats.

The one thing that really distinguishes us Democrats from Republicans is that we believe in the importance of communities, and we Democrats believe that we need to consider all those who live in those communities when making important decisions about our lives together.

Our Republican brethren at their most ideological are the great defenders of

the individual and the family. And, we Americans—when we look out at the world—know quite well that our individual liberties—freedom of speech, of the press, of association; freedom from unreasonable intrusion into our lives by the government; equal protection under the laws, and so on—all of these freedoms cannot be taken for granted. We must guard these through vigilance and participation. And, we also know that as a result of the great transformation the American family has undergone in the last 30 years, today’s American

family rarely looks like the family in my Republican fable. I believe the one thing that we Democrats really can do to help the family is to create communities that nourish and support it. No individual or family lives in a vacuum. Our lives together *count*. Our individual liberties mean nothing outside of a functioning democratic community. That is why I believe we need to concentrate on rebuilding our sense of community in this country. That is what I believe Democrats can and should offer as their platform.

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KALAMAZOO COUNTY DEMOCRAT

Editor
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Letter from the Chair

Thank you for all the support you have extended to me as I move into the chairmanship of the KCDP. This is a very exciting step for me both personally and as a member of the Democratic Party. I aim to live up to your expectations—and more—to move our party forward.

We are 18 months away from the elections of 2000 and we have many great opportunities before us to elect Democrats to the various local, state, and national offices. To do this we will continue with the election preparation program started by Brian Johnson, our former chair, entitled *Goal 2000*. This program involves (1) member recruitment; (2) message development and publicity; (3) candidate recruitment and training; and (4) fund-raising.

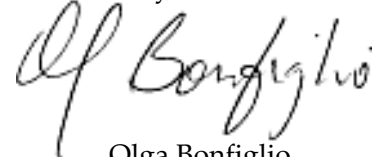
In preparing for Election 2000 I have set some ambitious goals. First, I want us to win back a majority position on the County Commission. I want us to win some seats on our township boards. At present we have only three Democrats in office at the township level in the whole county. We can do better! Of course, we must work to retain the 60th district state representative seat AND set our sights on winning the 61st and the 63rd district seats. These goals *are* attainable if we work hard—and start now. We must know the issues of these various districts so that we can address the voters' needs and speak to them in our campaigns. We must recruit new members in various geographical and constituency areas to make our Democratic presence

more prominent. Finally, we must build on the good response we got from the county-wide Carambula campaign last November. Remember: Senator Levin, Governor Blanchard, and President Clinton *all* took Kalamazoo County in each of their elections so this *is* possible. By 2002 I would like to see us truly make Kalamazoo County a Democratic county—especially so that we can take that state senate seat in 2002. But that work must begin now! Members of the Executive Committee are now organizing and gathering resources for the election. This includes making the party more visible to and more communicative with the public and the Democratic membership. We are also trying to identify more Democrats, recruit more members, raise more money, and encourage

more volunteerism.

Your participation in these endeavors will allow us to get started on this important work. On the inside back page of this newsletter is a *Goal 2000* form which lists ways in which you can participate. Please let us know how you can help. Meanwhile, I'll keep you informed of our progress through this quarterly newsletter and various other communications.

Sincerely,



Olga Bonfiglio
County Chair

Democrats Meet on “Fourth Thursdays”

Every month, the Kalamazoo County Democratic Party holds its Fourth Thursday meeting, which includes an optional dinner from the menu, a speaker, news about party activities, reports from elected officials, and time to interact with other Democrats. Meetings are held at the Blue Dolphin in Downtown Kalamazoo (Burdick and Cedar Streets). Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. Speakers' presentations start at 7:30 p.m. No reservations are needed.

The next Fourth Thursday event will be held on Thursday, June 24. At this meeting, we will honor Democrats who have shown outstanding service during the past election year. As a special highlight, we will honor Sara Woodward, a WMU student, who was recently named a Truman Scholar.

Fourth Thursday will take a summer break in July and August and then resume on Thursday, September 23.

Internet Resources Hot Spots on the Web for Researching Issues and Legislative Action

The Democratic Party Online - www.democrats.org
Michigan Democratic Party - www.mi-democrats.com
Legal Information Institute - www.law.cornell.edu
White House - www.whitehouse.gov

REPORTS

County Commissioner's Report

by *Commissioner Mary Powers*

In preparation for the community information gathering session on the new jail, I worked a shift at the jail. It was a very active Monday evening with inmates coming in from court. We need a new jail and a new juvenile home in or near Kalamazoo County.

Recently, County Commissioners Dave Buskirk, Eva Ozier, and Mary Powers met with Mayor Robert Jones, Vice Mayor Hannah McKinney, City Manager Pat DiGiovanni, and County Administrator Randy Terronez to discuss issues that affect both the city and the county. I suggested several areas of potential collaboration including recycling

services and criminal justice. It was agreed by all that such meetings were worth repeating.

The county has received \$25,000 in discretionary funding via the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to assist with "Best Management Practices" for retaining stormwater on site at municipal buildings. I've been facilitating stormwater meetings for the units of government in the county that will be regulated under the new Federal Phase II Stormwater regulations. This has been interesting and gratifying work, with solid intergovernmental cooperation right from the beginning.

1999 Fundraising Report

Our April fund drive raised \$4,120 with a total of 102 members contributing so far. During the summer and fall months, more donors will be solicited. Various fundraising events are

also planned for the fall including the Mary Brown/Paul Todd Dinner. A complete report of this year's fundraising efforts will be printed in this newsletter in December 1999.

Kalamazoo County Democrats Summer Picnic

Sunday, June 27, 1999 • 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

River Oaks County Park
(At the corner of 33rd Street and M-96,
between Comstock and Galesburg)

Bring a dish to pass and your own beverages

- Meat Will Be Furnished •

RSVP:
Kelley Burch, 375-2985
Vicki Purcell, 323-7525

*Needed:
Volunteers, Baseball Equipment, Badminton Racquets*

BRIEFS

Mary Brown/Paul Todd Dinner

The biennial Mary Brown/Paul Todd Dinner will be held in September. This year's guest of honor will be Howard Wolpe, who served the Kalamazoo area as a U.S Representative, a state representative, and a city commissioner. Howard is currently a presidential special envoy to the Great Lakes Region of Africa for the Clinton Administration. More details to come!

Condolences

To **Tom Clemons**, former chair of the party, on the death of his mother.

To **Martha Moffett**, on the death of her husband, **Bruce**.

Woodward Named Truman Scholar

Recent Western Michigan University graduate Sara Woodward has been named a Truman Scholar. Woodward served as a campaign manager for Kristi Carambula's state senate race last fall.

The Truman award is a highly prestigious award of \$30,000 given to students interested in pursuing graduate study in government and public service. Woodward was one of 65 students to receive the award out of 657 applicants nationwide. She will attend graduate school to specialize in international relations, but will first spend a year in China to continue her study of Chinese language and culture starting next fall. Woodward, the first student in WMU history to receive the award, will be honored by the county Democrats at the June 24 Fourth Thursday meeting.

Concealed Guns Promoted by G.O.P.

House, Senate Pass Differing Bills

Continued from page 1

Even as the reaction to Littleton was growing, Michigan's gun lobby quietly kept liberalized concealed weapons legislation on the legislative tracks. "The gun lobby knows that the people of Michigan are against this measure so they've tried to push it through quickly and quietly before the public finds out," according to State Rep. Ed LaForge (D-Kalamazoo) who is spearheading the opposition to the bill. In a recent poll conducted by EPIC MRA, a Michigan opinion research firm, 72 percent of Michigan residents said they feel it is important for an applicant to demonstrate need before receiving a permit to carry a concealed gun. But the bill would do away with that and force local gun boards to issue permits to anyone over 21 who is not a felon or mentally ill and who has passed 11 hours of firearms training.

Prior to Littleton, State Rep. Mike Green (R-Mayville) was quoted as saying, "This thing's greased," referring to the package of 15 bills that would make it possible for virtually anyone to carry a concealed handgun. But as word has gotten out about the bill, opposition has grown beyond the law enforcement community to include doctors, professional athletes, and many in the business community—including owners of malls, shopping centers, movie theaters, restaurants and bars. All fear that some of the people packing concealed handguns will lose their tempers at work, in a stadium or on a barstool and take out their anger with bullets rather than with words or considerably less lethal fisticuffs. Referees and umpires are thought to be the most vulnerable.

Guns in School

Perhaps the most damning admission from gun proponents came when Green, the chief sponsor of the proposed concealed weapons law, said on a statewide public television program (ironically called *Off the Record*) that concealed weapons would be allowed on school property under his bill. He also confirmed what opponents of the measure had been saying for weeks: that virtually anyone would be able to get a concealed weapons permit and carry a concealed handgun into any public place, including restaurants, bars, concerts,

sport events and the workplace. And by Green's own estimate, if Michiganders want concealed weapons as much as residents from other states with liberal gun laws, some 200,000 to 300,000 more people in Michigan will be carrying them.

The sponsor of an even more lax bill in the Michigan Senate, State Sen. David Jaye (R-Washington Township) has said that the Littleton shooting would not have been so bad if teachers and principals had been carrying weapons at the school. "Colorado has the most restrictive gun laws in the nation," Jaye said. "Those thugs knew that no one else there had a gun to defend themselves." Neither statement, of course, is true. Colorado's laws are hardly the strictest, and an armed security guard at Columbine High exchanged shots with the two perpetrators to no avail.

Such is the mentality of the die-hard gun enthusiasts. Jaye comes from a suburban district in Macomb County outside Detroit, and many of his constituents agree with him. In fact, one out of every 79 residents in Macomb has been granted a concealed weapons permit by the county gun board. About half of all concealed weapons permits granted in Michigan last year were granted by Macomb County. The gun board there has been following a very lax interpretation of the current concealed weapons law for some time. Prosecutors and sheriffs—who elsewhere in Michigan shudder at the thought of issuing permits freely—must promise in Macomb to issue them practically on demand or be defeated at the polls. (County prosecutors and sheriffs in Michigan are elected and sit on the county gun boards as part of their duties.)

By contrast, Kalamazoo County prefers to keep a tight leash on permits, issuing only one for every 4,253 residents. Proponents of the new law often avoid a direct answer to whether the law will make it easier for anyone to get a concealed weapons permit. Instead, as House Speaker Chuck Perricone (R-Kalamazoo Township) did recently, they say that they want to make the law more uniform. The truth, of course, is that the law will force gun boards to issue permits even when no need is demonstrated. And, the new procedures will make it much easier to obtain a permit everywhere in Michigan. This is what proponents mean by "uniform."

Supporters also claim that the measure will reduce crime by keeping criminals guessing about who has a gun. But in a twist that seemed to come from a novel, Perricone announced one week after House passage of

"The gun lobby knows that the people of Michigan are against this measure."

—Rep. Ed LaForge

the bill that metal detectors would be installed in the House gallery and security would be beefed up in House offices. Opponents of the proposed concealed weapons law are now asking why the state

LaForge says that you don't have to look too far for the reason. The National Rifle Association dumped money into Republican primaries in 1998 and their candidates won. Now, it's payback time. And so an associa-

County, part of which I represent, the various police departments are now working together to provide ongoing training in the use of deadly force. They say that without that training it's difficult even for a police officer to

concealed weapons law had been on low boil. The public didn't seem to know about the pending legislation. Rep. Laura Baird (D-Ingham County) was so frustrated by the lack of public awareness that she asked in front of

"I worry about motorists who vent their anger in road rage now having a firearm available to escalate their anger. I'm concerned about law-abiding citizens who may imbibe too much and make a fatal decision in anger they'll later regret."

—James Gregart, Kalamazoo County Prosecutor

capital would suddenly need metal detectors if the law is supposed to make things safer, as Perricone and other supporters claim. Perhaps Mr. Perricone, these opponents wondered aloud, doesn't really believe his own rhetoric about Michigan being a safer place with more concealed handguns everywhere.

Republicans Push for Less Local Control

LaForge says he can live with the current law. "If the people of Macomb County want to have every 79th person packing a pistol, then so be it. But don't force the residents of Kalamazoo County to do likewise when the vast majority of them don't want concealed weapons permits given to just anyone," he explained. "In fact, I'm puzzled by the Republican leadership in the House and Senate and the governor's office who have so often said they are for local control. Now they want to take that control away."

tion that began as an organization of sportsmen is now pushing more guns onto the street instead of into the woods.

Opposition Builds

LaForge and five other Michigan House members have banded together to fight the bill. They sent a letter to the editor to all of the state's daily newspapers. In the letter, the six members explain that they are not seeking to take guns away from hunters or those who want them at home for personal protection. They only wish to keep public spaces free from handguns. Leave the use of guns in public places to trained law enforcement officers, they write, who know how to practice proper restraint. It would only be a hazard to put "poorly trained civilians into situations where they have to make split-second decisions about firing a gun in public."

"It's ironic," LaForge said, "that in Kalamazoo

make the right decisions about using a gun."

Police Worry

Police groups and prosecutors have predictably lined up against liberalizing the guns laws for fear that safety—their own and that of the public—will be compromised. Kalamazoo County Prosecutor James Gregart pointed to a recent road rage incident in the county while speaking to the Kalamazoo Gazette: "I worry about motorists who vent their anger in road rage now having a firearm available to escalate their anger. I'm concerned about law-abiding citizens who may imbibe too much and make a fatal decision in anger they'll later regret."

Even the prosecutor in Macomb County, Carl Marlinga, no longer supports the bill and has vowed to work against it should it become law.

Until recently, opposition to loosening the

reporters, "Is anyone here in Michigan watching what's happening in the rest of America?"

Now the issue has suddenly emerged as a result of Green's televised revelation that concealed weapons will be everywhere if the bill passes. Opponents seized on the issue and spread the word that Michigan could end up with vastly more concealed weapons permit holders after Littleton and—irony of ironies—give them legal access to schools and school events. House Speaker Perricone then surprised his own allies—including Green—by saying that schools and many other public places would be protected from concealed handguns.

As it stands, the state House and Senate have passed somewhat different versions of the bill that will need to be reconciled. Despite overwhelming opposition in the polls, both

"Coalition" continued on page 6

Coalition Opposes Bill

Bipartisan Group Plans Referendum

Continued from page 5

passed bills by comfortable margins, 75-32 in the House and 26-12 in the Senate. Although the Senate bill outlaws carrying concealed weapons in several venues such as stadiums, churches and schools, neither bill grapples with how such bans would be enforced. Opponents say that the penalties are much too light and enforcement virtually impossible short of airport-type security at every public place.

Referendum Discussed

A coalition has now emerged. Calling itself "People Who Care About

Kids," the group plans to put the bill on the November 2000 ballot as a referendum should it become law. The coalition includes prominent Democrats, including Baird, Attorney General Jennifer Granholm, Wayne County Executive Ed McNamara and his deputy, Mike Duggan, as well as religious leaders, all four Detroit professional sports teams, theater owners, mall owners and others. The coalition also includes one prominent Republican, Oakland County Executive Brooks Patterson, who said he didn't want the Democrats to be the only ones with a "claim on sanity" in the state.

Gov. John Engler, who had been saying he would sign such a bill, has now backed away and become increasingly vague about his intentions. Some say he thinks the Republicans should just drop the issue. Engler seems to be about the only Republican in Lansing to have read the polls and believes they spell trouble for Republicans on the gun issue in 2000.

Meanwhile, opposition continues to grow, putting Republicans in a terrible spot. Every legislator in both houses has now voted on the bill, so it's bound to be an issue in legislative races in 2000

whether it becomes law or not.

The growing public awareness of the issue and the public's subsequent revulsion is due in part to rhetoric of those supporting the measure, according to LaForge. "It was stupid to admit on statewide television that people would be able to take concealed weapons into schools," he said. "But, I'm glad Mike Green did it. Now the word is finally getting out about just how dangerous this bill is. You know, some of our best spokesmen are on the other side of this issue."

—Kurt Cobb

SPOTLIGHT

Mary Hurlbut Cordier, who wrote the book *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains 1860s-1920s* (University of New Mexico Press, 1997), made a presentation on the book to the Friends of the Kalamazoo Public Library in May. Mary is a retired WMU professor of education.

James H. Geary, a senior attorney with Howard & Howard Attorneys' Kalamazoo office, was recently re-certified as a facilitative mediator by the United State District Court for the Western District of Michigan.

Shirley VanHoeven, professor of communication at Western Michigan University, received the WMU Distinguished Service Award. She was recognized for her contributions to academic services at the university and for many volunteer and consulting activities in the community.

Several Democrats are scheduled to appear on the community access show *Public Voice* in June and July. **Tom Dietz** discusses the economic history of Kalamazoo. **Dave Wallace** and **Patrick Hudson** both speak about urban sprawl.

Iris Salters was recently elected vice president of the Michigan Education Association. This Lansing-based position is full-time with a three-year term. She moves into that position after service as president of the 875-member Kalamazoo Education Association for seven years.

Suzanne Winch was named to the League of Women Voters Board. Suzanne is the director of constituent services for the 60th District Service Office of State Representative **Ed LaForge**.

Ron Crowell, WMU professor of education, was guest speaker for the Kalamazoo County Education Association's annual Partners in Education dinner. He talked about changes taking place in education and the path he feels education should take to prepare for the future.

Let Us Put Your Latest Accomplishments In The Spotlight

See page 1 for information on how to submit items.

VOLUNTEERS

Soup Saturdays

Every second Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, Democrats prepare a meal at Ministry with Community (440 N. Church St.). For more information, contact Betsy Rice, 668-3549.

District Service Office — 60th District

We need volunteers for office work and constituent contact. For information, contact Suzanne Winch at the DSO, 382-4676.

Board & Commission Monitors

In order to help our candidates address the concerns of the constituents of an area, they need to know and understand the issues and trends as they are discussed in the meetings of the boards and commissions. In order to do this, we need volunteers to monitor county and township meetings (in person or from cable access) and then to report their findings. Sign up for this work on the *Goal 2000* sheet below.

Public Speakers

We need many voices to deliver the Democratic message. Opportunities abound. You may be interested in speaking out about a particular issue to various public groups. You may like to help the member recruitment effort and speak to people about Democrats. These public speaking activities are good practice for potential candidates—and for people who like to get out front and influence groups. Sign up for this work on the *Goal 2000* sheet below.

News Monitors

We need people to do various news watches: clip articles on issues, videotape news stories, read and report on current political books. Listen to news and interviews on various radio stations. Sign up for this work on the *Goal 2000* sheet below.

Member Recruiters

We are trying to broaden our reach to geographic areas outside the city of Kalamazoo and among various constituency groups. Committees are now forming to develop strategies. Sign up for this work on the *Goal 2000* sheet below.

Kalamazoo County Democratic Party

Goal 2000 Contribution

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Skills and Abilities

Please contact me about volunteering for the following:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mailings | <input type="checkbox"/> Events planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking neighborhoods | <input type="checkbox"/> Board / commission monitoring | <input type="checkbox"/> Public speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership recruitment | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund-raising |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Voter registration | <input type="checkbox"/> Las Vegas nights | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer recruitment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office work | <input type="checkbox"/> News monitoring (radio, TV, newspaper) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____ | | |

Please return this form to: Olga Bonfiglio, 471 W. South St. #405, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Democrats Represent “Balance”

Bonfiglio Urges Dems to “Spread the Word”

Continued from page 1

Now, what can we say Democrats represent? We represent quality public education, an old age free from want and desperation, and universal access to health care. Democrats believe in striking a balance between business and labor, between economic growth and environmental protection, and between personal responsibility and concern for the weakest members of our society.

We have much to be proud of as Democrats. But if we truly want to lead, I believe, we have to stay with themes that have always served us well:

community, fairness, compassion, justice. You know, Ronald Reagan started running for president in 1968. He stayed on the same themes for 12 years: Government is bad, government is the problem, taxes are confiscation, all public institutions are automatically suspect. He said these things again and again, and people joined him. And, even though his message was destructive and sometimes hateful, he finally won. He got the American people, or at least more than 50 percent of the voters, to believe what he was saying.

We have a message, too, if we could just stick with it. Communities are important. And part of a strong community is government that works, at every level—local, state and federal. And, taxes—though we must use them wisely for public benefit—are not confiscation. Rather, as the great supreme court justice, Oliver Wendell Holmes, tells us: “Taxes are what we pay for civilized society.” And, isn’t that what we want: a civilized society. One where people are treated with respect. One where people have opportunity. One where people can obtain justice. Justice,

not only in the courts, but social and economic justice as well.

If you believe as I do, that most important thing we Democrats can do is to help create stronger communities, then I am also asking you to spread the word about what we Democrats really stand for. As I said before, no individual or family can truly thrive in isolation. We all need and want strong communities—communities that nurture us, that protect us, that guide us—so that each of us can reach our full potential.

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