

## Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



# Coverage Dwindling of State Politics in Lansing

Will the bright light of public scrutiny dim even more under the Capitol dome?

While there have been notable journalistic successes over the span, there is much to lament about cutbacks in coverage of state government and politics since I, decades ago, started covering Lansing for United Press International (UPI).

There was the long-ago demise of UPI as a zesty competitor of the Associated Press, and then the closing of Lansing bureaus by Detroit TV stations, and by widely heard WJR radio, and downsizing of the bureaus of Detroit newspapers.

Throughout that span, excellent coverage was maintained by Booth Newspapers, including those in Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo, Jackson, Muskegon, Flint, Bay City, and Saginaw. (Two longtime Booth Lansing bureau chiefs are in the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame, Guy Jenkins and Bill Kulsea.)

Publisher Bill Ballenger of *Inside Michigan Politics* newsletter says Booth has "done an outstanding job for more than a half century — one of the shining beacons of political journalism." But he raises the question whether now it is "trying to get political coverage on the cheap?"

Buyout fever, which has hit the auto and other industries, is at play in Booth's Lansing bureau, with buyout offers made to 10 of the 16 employees who report to Bureau Chief Meegan Holland.

Of the 16, the six who cover sports, including Detroit professional teams, are excluded from the buyout offer — a reflection of the focus of readers, including this one, on sports.

Holland hopes that after pending sale of the building that houses the bureau, "we'll still have a Lansing presence. Hope is the key word. We'll know more by late June."

Like the Detroit papers, as well as most dailies in northern Michigan, the downstate Booth papers have had revolving door ownerships. Booth currently is a division of privately owned Advance Publications, which also owns the *Times-Picayune* in hurricane-ravaged New Orleans.

Could Katrina losses down there be impacting operations in Lansing?

### Hardball

Much has been made about the

GOP complaint that Governor Jennifer Granholm is using kids as "political pawns" with her threat to cut state aid by \$125 per student unless Republicans agree to a tax increase to make up for plunging revenues.

Now comes Representative Kevin Elsenheimer with a letter to Granholm contending "it would appear that your office is engaging in a high stakes poker game to force the legislature to accede to additional taxes by refusing to release already budgeted, already appropriated funds that cannot be used for any general fund purpose." He says there's a delay on payments for snowmobile trails from restricted funds generated by registrations/permits.

Paul Beachnau, executive director of the Gaylord Tourism Bureau and chairman of the Otsego Board of Commissioners, said after an unsuccessful appeal to Granholm's Marquette office that "this is really going to screw us up" in preparing for a season that is important to the northern economy.

Granholm is not the first governor to juggle funds while negotiating agreement with recalcitrant lawmakers on how to avoid a looming cash crisis. But the snowmobile funds, like those generated by boat registrations, are earmarked in a cookie jar that cannot be tapped to bail out the general fund.

### Cradle to Grave

I've observed previously that that has been the span of the consumer protection initiatives of Attorney General Mike Cox, who has cracked down on everything from deadbeat parents on child support to abuses in nursing homes that have resulted in death.

Last week, he charged an Oklahoma man, Clayton Ray Smart, with alleged embezzlement of up to \$70 million in cemetery trust funds affecting 28 cemeteries in Michigan.

Among them were three in the Upper Peninsula, Oaklawn Chapel Gardens, Sault Ste. Marie; Northland Chapel Gardens, Negaunee; and Garden of Rest, Wells.

Cox called it "a disgusting theft from the dead of Michigan."

*George Weeks retired last year after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.*

## Zoo-De-Mackinac Set for May 19

Saturday, May 19, has been announced as the date for the 18th annual Zoo-De-Mackinac Bike Bash. About 2,000 bicycle riders are expected to travel in the non-

competitive event from Boyne Highlands in Harbor Springs to Mackinac Island by way of US-119, a highway overlooking Lake Michigan.

## The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Separate Truth From Falsehood With Fort de Buade Museum

To the Editor:

In response to the letter about Fort de Buade Museum by Charles Adams, I would like to clarify truth from falsehood.

There may be two innocent reasons why this person may have been misinformed: It may be that he lives too far away to adequately research the situation; It may be he received false information from sources affiliated with a minor dissident group in this area, thought to be the source of the malicious and threatening e-mails to tribal members. A not-so-innocent reason is to promote false information and attack certain individuals as a means of political gain, with the Fort de Buade Museum in the middle.

I tend to think the last reason is the true object. Especially after reading this article by Jack Storey published in *The Evening News*: "On the phone last week, Adams confirmed that the museum objections are just the opening salvo of an assault on the current tribal board. He also confirmed his intention to take a place in the middle of the campaign but not from far-away Nevada. Originally from Cheboygan, Adams said he is moving back to Michigan to do political battle in the upcoming off-year electoral process. He acknowledged his public opposition to the museum purchase has political intent. Asked if his group of dissidents has a name, Adams said the associated group does not go by any particular name. 'Most of them are local, in St. Ignace, Sault Ste. Marie, and the Cedarville area,' he said. There are 10 to 12 people working together to move forward our agenda. There are lots more who support what we're trying to do," he said."

Mr. Adams' attack on Fort de Buade is laden with fallacy. I personally cannot imagine how one can think that this sort of campaign will be successful. People need to trust their leaders.

This group was unable to come up with even 100 legitimate signatures out of a tribal membership of 30,000 for their petition against Fort de Buade. The petition failed, as many signatures were disqualified. Your support is very minimal, not numerous, as you said. Twelve people? Is that a lot? Less than 100 out of 30,000?

The Tribal board voted 8-3 to approve the Fort de Buade resolution. Even if you were somehow able to gain two seats on that board, as you projected, you would need more than that to change that majority vote for Fort de Buade.

We also know that it is not in the best interest for either the municipality or the Tribe to break agreements with each other. The Tribe has a time-honored reputation for keeping their agreements, and so does the city, regardless of who their board or council members are; it is high priority to keep faith and trust in agreements.

I, too, had gone to the museum several times. I went back several times because there are so many artifacts in there it takes more than one trip to see them, over 2,000 in fact. But I never really understood the significance of them until I spent several years in college studying cultures and history.

Thus, I have spent the last year doing my best to save that heritage and teach people what it truly is, to make them aware of it. It exceeds, by far, any other museum in the world that deals with this time and place.

The real information has been made available to the public. From the beginning, when the resolution was approved, we brought copies of the inventory, appraisal, and photographs of the artifacts to the Unit III Tribal meeting in St. Ignace, after which we have kept them at the museum for anyone who wanted to investigate the facts. Many people have come there, gone through the museum, and looked at the information, including tribal board members.

This museum is called the "Fort de Buade Indian Museum" for a reason. The entire history of this area is from the point of view of Native American peoples that lived here and remain, despite all that happened. To explain history here, Dr. Donald Benson chose to portray it through the eyes of the Native American people.

It starts in the first hallway with the pre-contact period. That is the time when the first Woodland Indians lived here more than 2,000 years ago. They were not the Anishnabe, but Natives, nevertheless, and a part of the history here. We should not forget them. The museum then walks you through the time when the Anishnabe migrated here from the east coast. It portrays the tribes to which they made contact as allies and as enemies, and then it begins to examine the first explorers, what they used in trade, how they mapped this place out, and how relations turned both good and sour as a result. It covers the fur trade, the Jesuit missionaries, exploration, and expansion.

Michilimackinac was the center of trade because this is where people could all meet easily. This is where the Great Lakes met. And the lakes were the only highways back then. Our ancestors traversed this place for hundreds and hundreds of years. The Europeans did not discover it. Our ancestors did not live in stationary houses with picket fences. They moved, everywhere from the St. Lawrence to the Mississippi to the Canadian Northwest. You will find your relatives in all of these places. It was a vast trade network that existed long before the fur trade came here. St. Ignace and the Soo were the places that were central to that trade for hundreds of years.

This museum shows, through visual artifacts, the story of what happened to the Anishnabe through contact from other nations. Thus, about 1,000 of the artifacts are non-native, but they are all quite necessary and appropriate to tell that story.

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### St. Ignace News Policies

#### Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

#### Obituaries:

The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

#### Weddings:

Weddings with photographs are published without charge within 45 days of the ceremony. After 45 days, a photograph can be included for \$35.00.

#### Internet:

The complete edition of The St. Ignace News is available online at [stignacenews.com](http://stignacenews.com).

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### Confusion of Fort de Buade Agreement Must Be Cleared up

*Editor's Note: Charles Adams Jr. submitted a letter to St. Ignace Mayor Paul Grondin with a copy for publication in The St. Ignace News. Points already made by Mr. Adams in a letter we published April 12 have been removed here, in the interest of space.*

To the Editor:

At a recent St. Ignace City Council meeting, the council decided to await the results of a public hearing before acting on an offer by the Sault Tribe to fund the private business known as Fort de Buade. The delay suggests that there may be some fear in the minds of some members of the Council that the Sault Tribe 2-percent monies may be cut off before the end of the pending six-year agreement, thereby leaving the city "holding the bag" for a significant portion of the purchase price. If such a fear does exist, it would seem to be well founded. As you may be aware, there is a group of Sault Tribe members, including some highly respected Elders, who object to and are working to prevent the allocation of 2-percent monies for this particular purchase. Some of those objections, all of which were based on the belief that the allocation is improper, possibly illegal, and certainly ill considered, have been communicated in an earlier letter.

It was not known until after a vote of the board had occurred that the resolution authored by Sault Tribe board member Keith Massaway had not originated with the City of St. Ignace and, in fact, the city had not been consulted on the potential money windfall until some time after the resolution had been submitted. That information was not communicated to the Sault Tribe board of directors at the time the resolution was first offered and voted on, and was not willingly communicated to the Tribe membership at any time. It was also learned subsequently that the monies to be allocated were not really for the city, but for the owner of Fort de Buade, a private party, who had agreed to sell the property to the Michilimackinac Historical Society (MHS). According to the minutes of a St. Ignace City Council meeting, the city was to act merely as a conduit — "a pass-through entity" — for moving the money from the Tribe through the MHS to the individual owner.

Several more red flags have been raised as a result of the confusion that has resulted from the apparent composition of the property, its oft-changing price, and who, in the final analysis, will hold title to the property. For example, in mid-2006, the owner offered Fort de Buade, the building and its contents, to MHS for \$500,000. This conflicts with a recent *St. Ignace News* article by Ryan Schlehuber, in which he wrote, "The collection and other contents would be donated by the family." In the same *News* article, Mr. Schlehuber seemed to contradict his own earlier statement by writing, "On the table is an offer from the tribe...to purchase the building and valuable museum collection." (The emphasis is mine). Does the Fort de Buade property consist of only the dilapidated building, or does it also include all of the contents, of which the authenticities and values of many are held to be contentious? Given the above statements, the answer to that question is impossible to know.

In mid-2006, the owner set the price for Fort de Buade at \$500,000. An agreement for purchase of the property (building, contents, or both?) by the MHS apparently was made at that time, as Mr. Schlehuber recently has written: "Last year, the historical society reached an agreement...to purchase the building for \$500,000." (Note: There is no mention of building contents in this statement). Most recently, the purchase price has been quoted as \$708,000. This latest price is consistent with that requested by Keith Massaway in the resolution presented to the Sault Tribe board in early January 2007, although that figure is fully \$210,000, or 42 percent, higher than the private owner's asking price.

Why has the price of Fort de Buade escalated by 42 percent? Mr. Massaway asserted that the additional money was needed to cover legal fees, taxes, and other financing costs associated with the purchase. Mr. Schlehuber writes: "The tribe's offer of \$700,000 would be enough to purchase the property and collections and leave enough left over to start up the business." (The emphasis is mine).

Tribal members have asked for an explicit accounting of the

\*Please turn to page 10

### St. Ignace's French, Indian History Is Important To Protect, Preserve

To the Editor:

After having researched the history of the native and European populations of the Straits of Mackinac for more than three decades, I published in 2004 the two-volume set entitled "Rendezvous at the Straits: Fur Trade and Military Activities at Fort de Buade and Fort Michilimackinac, 1669-1781." Due to my extensive research in both the archaeological and documentary records of the Straits, I am acutely aware of the great importance of the activities that took place in the St. Ignace area during the historic period. Various of my own French ancestors lived at St. Ignace from 1685 on.

For a variety of reasons, the significant history of the native and French populations of the Straits region, and particularly the events that took place at St. Ignace, have been very much underplayed at the historic sites and museums of the area, and in historical publications. Considerably greater emphasis has been placed on the activities of the British and American populations, and on the events that took place on the south side of the Straits and on Mackinac Island. Thus, it is very important that the city of St. Ignace have a museum that focuses specifically on the history of the native and French people in the St. Ignace area, a museum whose collections represent the mixture of these two cultures that developed and evolved over the course of several centuries.

I applaud the actions of the residents of St. Ignace and the St. Ignace City Council in supporting the continuation of the Fort de Buade Museum and the activities of the Michilimackinac Historical Society.

Timothy J. Kent  
Ossineke

### Spend Money on Repairs, Not on Extra Seats on Road Commission

To the Editor:

It would be nice if Clark Township did have a resident elected official on the current road commission. In the recent past, we were in that enviable position, and it was nice to call or see someone you knew if you had a concern with the roads.

I believe that we still have representation, even though we don't have a resident from Clark Township.

Is it really necessary to change the rules of the game because we in Clark Township do not have a resident on the road commission?

I do not feel that I have been disenfranchised because we aren't represented, but I would feel that way if the road commissioners were appointed.

I do not feel that increasing the number of road commissioners is going to do anything for the roads in Clark Township, or anywhere else in the county.

The cost of a road commissioner is around \$20,000. That isn't a fortune, but it is still money that could be spent on roads, hopefully in Clark Township.

Douglas W. Smith  
Cedarville