

# Constitutional amendment will guarantee victims' rights

By H. THEODORE CRISWELL JR.

One of the issues on the Maryland ballot on Nov. 8 is Question 1, a proposed amendment to the Maryland Constitution to establish the following basic rights for victims of crime:

"To be informed of the rights established in this article and, upon request and if practicable, to be notified of, to attend, and to be heard at a criminal justice proceeding."

This amendment requires a simple majority of votes to pass and be signed into law. I would like to focus your attention on this most urgent issue.

My wife, Gwyn, was brutally murdered near the library in Crofton on the morning of Sept. 16, 1990. Although my sons and I were treated with compassion and understanding by the Anne Arundel County Police and the state's attorney and his staff throughout the 16 months of criminal proceedings, we were still victim-

## Guest column

mized by the criminal justice system.

Because of these negative experiences, and because of the emotional support we received from Roberta Roper, we joined the Stephanie Roper Committee, or SRC, in early 1992 and the Maryland Coalition for a Constitutional Amendment, or MCCA, later the same year.

I joined many others in testifying in the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate for legislation to improve the rights and treatment of crime victims, especially those who are victims of violent crime.

As a result of our efforts, legislation was passed which was supposed to provide victims with the basic rights to be informed, be present and be heard.

In spite of such statutes, crime victims in

Maryland continue to be excluded from trials, denied the right to provide written or oral victim impact statements prior to sentencing, and left uninformed about upcoming criminal justice proceedings.

The rights of the victims currently are solely dependent on the biases, actions and decisions of judges, state's attorneys' offices and prosecuting attorneys, many of whom actively oppose any rights for victims.

In our case, we had strong support from the state's attorney and his staff, but the judge — who never ruled on defense motions to exclude us from the trial and deny us the right to be heard prior to sentencing — could have chosen to deny us these basic rights without just cause.

Mrs. Roper and many others have been excluded from criminal justice proceedings. The widow of a slain state trooper had to hire a private attorney with her own money just to be

present in the courtroom, since the prosecuting attorney did not defend her rights.

One well-known judge in Prince George's County continues to deny families access to the courtroom and the right to give victim impact statements prior to sentencing. This same judge was quoted as saying "No victim will ever give a victim impact statement in my courtroom."

The existing statutes have only been effective when prosecuting attorneys have aggressively fought for the victim and judges have supported the requests.

This situation is not new and is not unique to Maryland. In 1982, President Reagan appointed a commission to identify ways to help crime victims. One of its recommendations was an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to guarantee basic rights to victims. But it was also recognized that it was first necessary to amend the individual state constitutions.

Today, 14 states have passed amendments and another 15 states, including Maryland, are in the process of doing so.

After six long years of testimony and aggressive lobbying by members of the SRC and the MCCA, the Maryland legislature finally, last April, passed a proposed constitutional amendment — Question 1 on next month's ballot.

I hope everyone who reads this recognizes the need for basic rights for victims of crime. This is a nonpartisan issue and has almost universal support from political leaders and candidates throughout the state. I urge all of you to vote for Question 1.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the MCCA, or you are a member of a group (civic, political, church, etc.) which would like to have a guest speaker to address this issue, please contact me at (301) 261-0326 or (410) 451-0849.

The writer is a Crofton resident.

## 'Push polls': This year's latest political dirty trick

Every time you think that the political campaign operatives have hit bottom and can't find anything sneakier and more underhanded to do, they prove you wrong. But I was unprepared for their latest tactic.

Four years ago, after seeing how negative television ads were poisoning the atmosphere, reporters and news organizations began to become more aggressive in disclosing the distortions and lies that were too often embedded in those ads. Negative ads remain in the arsenal of the candidates and campaign consultants. But more and more newspapers, radio and television stations are dissecting them and exposing the falsity of their claims.

The media advisers have learned that they better be ready to provide the documentation for their charges. They may even have become more careful about the claims that their ads make.

Mailings from the candidates often have been worse than the ads they put on the air. The mailings are harder for the press to detect. Often, they are targeted to narrow demographic or geographic audiences and timed to arrive just before Election Day, when the opportunities for opposition rebuttal or press analysis are foreclosed.

But the very fact that the mailings can be preserved and the signer identified provides a degree of deterrence against totally false charges — sometimes.

Last week, I was introduced to something far sneakier. It is known as the "push poll." It is a real stealth weapon, and I'm told by politicians in both the major parties that it is spreading like the plague.

Here's how it works: Your phone rings and someone from the "Acme Survey Center," or some other such vague name, says, "I'm taking a survey of voters. In the contest between Gwendolyn Jones and David Broder for the congressional seat in our district, would you favor Jones or Broder or are you undecided?"

If your answer is either Broder or undecided, the "interviewer" then says something like this: "If I told you that Broder's hobby is driving a high-powered sports car at dangerous speeds through residential neighborhoods and seeing how many pet cats and dogs he can run over, would that make a difference in your vote?" After another question or two, the interview closes with a repeat of the ballot question — Jones or Broder or undecided?

It's called a "push poll," because the idea is to see if certain "information" can "push" voters away from the opposition candidate or the undecided column into support of the candidate favored by the people paying for the poll.

Initially, I'm told, it was simply a research tool. Campaigns always do opposition research, trying to learn all they can about the background of the opponent. Then in small surveys or focus groups — round-table discussions with



David Broder

a dozen or so people — they test which items of "information" cause voters to rethink their original preference. It was a focus group of that sort that led the late Lee Atwater in 1988 to discover the power of the "information" about parole being granted to a convicted murderer under legislation signed by Michael Dukakis. That in turn led to the Bush campaign's famous revolving-door and Willie Horton ads.

Used in that way, in a small group setting, with accurate information, the "push poll" may be unlovely, but it's not really dirty politics.

It was not long, however, before other uses crept in. "Push polls," I'm told, are now used frequently to change the results of a survey so that an underdog candidate can tell potential contributors that "informed voters" give him or her an excellent chance of beating the favorite. What isn't said is that the "informed" voters have often been fed "information" of the running-over-pet-cats-and-dogs-for-a-hobby variety.

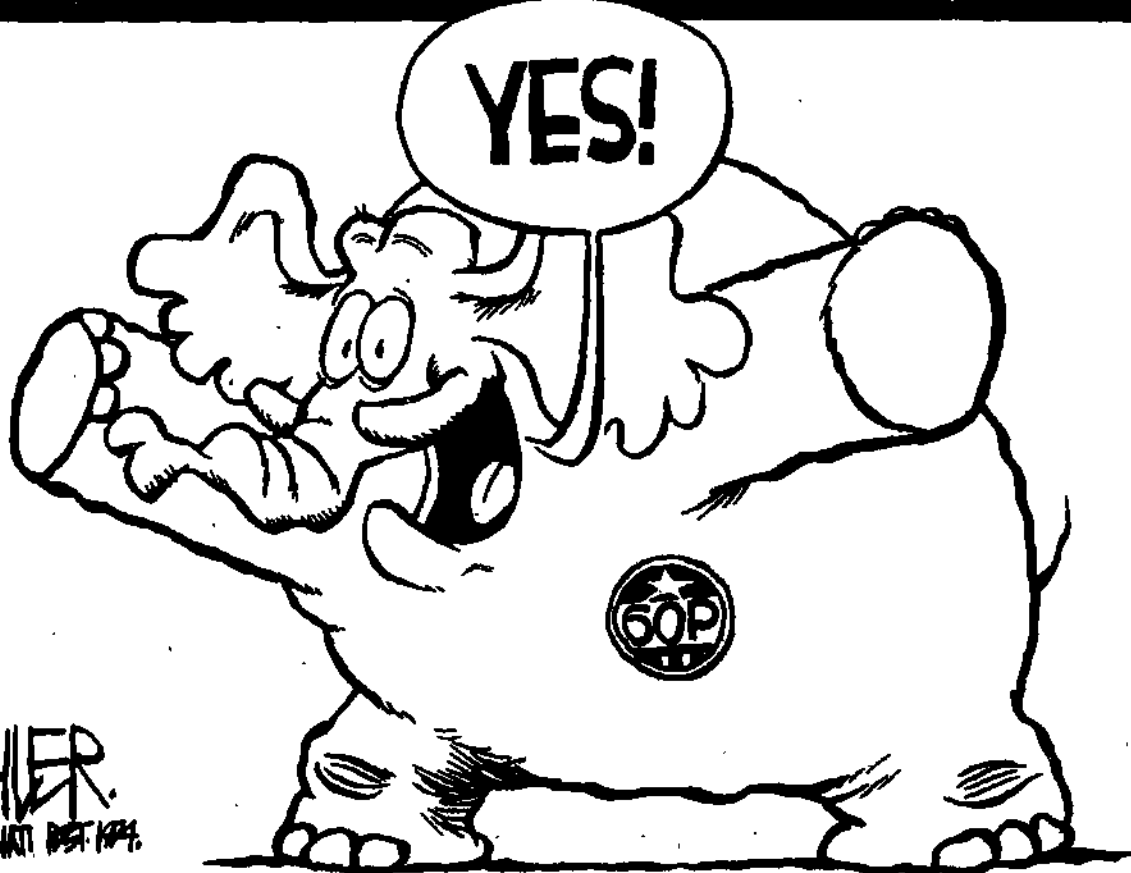
Even more vicious is the use of mass phone banks to pump thousands of calls into a district, feeding false information about the opposition candidate, under the guise of taking a poll. It was this practice that Rep. Thomas E. "Tim" Petri, R-Wis., decried in a brief House speech last week. Petri told me he had the tactic used against him in his last campaign. Rep. Steve Horn, R-Calif., ran into it in 1992, when someone paid callers to misinform thousands of his voters that he wanted to let Long Beach street gangs buy all the Uzis and assault weapons they might want.

It is not limited to one party. Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif., chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said it is being used with increasing frequency against Democrats as well, often on the eve of the primary or election in which they are running.

Each side blames the other. Both say that outside groups, representing one interest or another, often pay for the phoning to be done from a distant state to make the source of the mischief harder to trace and, they suspect, to evade the disclosure requirements for campaign expenditures.

Petri says the growing practice merits attention from the Federal Election Commission. Meantime, beware of so-called "pollsters" offering you disparaging "information" about political candidates. They're not on the level.

ARE YOU BETTER OFF TODAY THAN YOU WERE 4 YEARS AGO?



## Gambling brings trouble to Deadwood

Residents of the small, Wild West town of Deadwood, S.D. thought they had a hot hand when they voted to allow high-stakes casino gambling, but now they fear their luck has run out.

Deadwood has been dismantled by gaming industry prospectors, losing the tranquility and innocence that once characterized this Norman Rockwell-like town. Main Street's barber shops and clothing, hardware and grocery stores have been replaced by a four-block strip of 82 gaming halls. Customers at the town's one remaining grocery store must snake through a maze of slot machines to reach the cash register.

According to recent congressional testimony, one pizza restaurant manager with a spotless record embezzled more than \$45,000 from his employees to pay off his gambling debts. A bookkeeper committed suicide over his debts. And an Air Force sergeant's gambling addiction led to the murder of a casino operator over a \$400 loss.

"Before, I felt this town was a lot safer and you knew everybody up and down the main street," Jeff Bloomberg, state's attorney and Deadwood resident, told me. "Now I don't think it as friendly a place or as safe a place."

Deadwood's transformation came within the first three months after voters there elected to



Jack Anderson

legalize gambling in a 1988 statewide referendum. Overnight, the small town became the first place outside of Atlantic City, N.J., or Nevada to allow gaming halls.

There may be more Deadwoods in the future. This November voters in five states — Arkansas, Colorado, Missouri, Wyoming and Florida — will decide whether to legalize gambling. More than 20 states already allow some form of casino gambling. Experts estimate that by the end of the century every American will be within a four-hour drive of casino gambling.

More than 93 million Americans visit casinos every year. Legalized gambling surpasses baseball as the new national pastime, bringing in nearly \$30 billion every year. Florida voters this year have been promised an economic jackpot for voting to legalize nearly 50 dry land and

riverboat casinos statewide. A slice of the \$31 billion-per-year gaming business translates into the possibility of 67,000 new jobs — more than twice the number of employees at Walt Disney World.

Economically depressed areas of Mississippi, such as Tunica County and the city of Biloxi, have realized winnings from legalized gambling. But the long-term effects are less certain. "We are beginning to see evidence of the negative repercussions of the casino industry as they continue to proliferate throughout our city," A.J. Holloway, mayor of Biloxi, recently wrote to the House Committee on Small Business.

For every new tax dollar raised by casinos, communities that have bet on gambling have to spend another \$1.50 on criminal justice costs because of increased crime, according to a University of Illinois study. Deadwood has more than doubled the size of its police force.

Bloomberg says that shortly after he returned home from testifying before a congressional committee, several of Deadwood's casino owners threatened his life. "As I go around to these other towns that are thinking about legalizing gambling, I tell them if you are going to do it (that's) fine, but you better plan on the good and the bad," says Bloomberg.

## Readers' views

### Annapolis High

I am writing regarding the article headlined "Drop in SAT scores explained" (*The Capital*, Sept. 30) in which Annapolis High School, or AHS, guidance counselor Anthony Anzalone attributed the drop in scores to the Class of '94.

Phone calls to other administrators confirmed my belief that SAT scores reported for a school in any given year include all test-takers, not just those who graduated that year. Most college-bound students take the SAT during their junior year. Some take it as early as sixth grade to qualify for the Johns Hopkins CTY courses. Their scores are also included in a school's average.

Mr. Anzalone then goes on to publicly disparage a group of students that he was on staff to serve. He described this particular class as "not as academically mature" and not as "intrinsically motivated" as other classes.

The article further states that he and other counselors were surprised at the competitive colleges where some students were accepted. Yet these counselors and other AHS administrators extravagantly praised the accomplishments of these very same students at their awards ceremony and commencement just a few months ago.

Faculty member Leslie Gershon also contributed: "As a group, (last year's) class weren't as shining stars as we've had in years past." What?

If space allowed, I could list many members of this class who won scholarships and academic honors. Now that these students are off at college, in the military, or otherwise getting on with their lives, they are attacked in the hometown newspaper by representatives of

their own alma mater. These students and their families know that these comments are not true, but what about the general reader? What does this article do for the image of Annapolis High School?

DIANA SMEAR  
Annapolis

### City parking

I was appalled to read (*The Capital*, Sept. 24) about the forthcoming parking problems in the city of Annapolis due to the construction of the courthouse and the rebricking of Main Street.

It is unspeakable that the city fathers have been so shortsighted to even think that as few as 70 parking spaces will be sufficient for tourists and shoppers in the coming months. Having nine spaces at Gotts Court Garage is absolutely ludicrous. That is a very convenient garage for people parking at the West Street end of town, and for people who cannot park at Anne Arundel Medical Center's garage.

Please don't tell me that the county employees from the courthouse are being forced into these garages. They, along with state and city employees, belong up at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium parking lot, not taking paying parking spaces from visitors. After all, most of the employees park for nothing, at taxpayers' expense. As a taxpayer, I object strongly to that.

On another subject, raising the parking fees to \$1 an hour is nothing but pure greed on the city's part. Is this necessary to pay for the bricking of Main Street (which could well do with a regular road surface) and the brick wall on Rowe Boulevard? Has the city gone brick

mad?

And, to boot, the construction on Rowe Boulevard is creating problems already. It took me 15 minutes to get from the exit at Route 50 to the traffic light at Farragut Road the other day.

You might as well put up a sign that says "Don't bother to come to Annapolis — we don't have room for you to park."

JANET HOFFRITZ  
Edgewater

### 10-mile run

I am writing in response to the editorial on the disruption caused by the Annapolis Ten-Mile Run (*The Sunday Capital*, Sept. 4). This event has been going on for 19 years — same day, same time.

I know for a fact that the Annapolis Striders spend countless hours, weeks in advance, going door-to-door explaining what will take place in the neighborhoods and churches along the route.

Many came out and served water to or sprayed water on the hot runners. Local merchants are pleased, to say the least, at having 4,000 potential customers in town, not counting easily twice that many family and friends.

The minor disruption of taking an alternate route to church, or waiting a little longer to make the trip into town, is nothing compared to Navy football games or the boat shows — which cause disruptions that last a lot longer than three hours.

If New York City can close major routes through five boroughs for half a day, I think Annapolis can handle it — especially when the race will contribute in excess of \$12,000 to the

local Heart Fund and the Cardiac Care Unit at Anne Arundel Medical Center.

I am sure there are some out there who have directly benefited from those worthwhile organizations. I, for one, am willing to put up with the minor inconvenience that happens for three hours, one day out of the year, in return for all that the Annapolis Ten-Mile Run gives back to the community.

RONALD BOWMAN  
Annapolis

### Good deed

I was unfortunately involved in a fender-bender on a Saturday afternoon on Jennifer Road between Annapolis Mall and Jennifer Plaza. Although no one was hurt, my bumper was pushed back against the tire, making driving impossible. I limped into the parking lot in front of Boat US, where I sat for a moment deciding what to do.

Well, one question at the store produced two helpful employees with tools, line, and suggestions, followed by two gentlemen passers-by who provided breaker bars, a sledgehammer and even more line. With their help, I was able to free the tire and drive home without having to call a tow truck.

I was so relieved, I neglected to get their names, but, to you all, an official thank you! Annapolis is still small enough that a neighbor will still help out a neighbor in trouble, and that deserves special recognition in today's "not my problem" society.

STEVE BRADSHAW  
Annapolis

## YEARS AGO . . . FROM THE PAGES OF THE CAPITAL

### 25 years ago this week

■ Oct. 9, 1969: The Orioles, having swept their playoff series with the Twins, are to meet the Mets in the World Series.

### 50 years ago this week

■ Oct. 9, 1944: Residents and property owners of the area south of Linthicum, the proposed site of a Baltimore airport, form "The Fifth District Protective Association of Anne Arundel County" to gather information and sound out public opinion.

### 100 years ago this week

■ Oct. 9, 1894: In *The Capital's* lost-and-found column a "liberal reward" is offered for the return of two \$10 bills lost between Ridout's Store on Main Street and the Market House. The same column announces that "a small sum of money" has been found and can be reclaimed by the owner at the newspaper's office.

— Compiled by Glenwood Gibbs