

HOME

One year after Sept. 11, Lansing Mayor David Hollister worries about the consequences of the USA Patriot Act on civil liberties. LCC President Paula Cunningham reflects that she goes out of her way to understand cultural differences since 9/11. Radio show personality Tim Barron thinks the average American Joe Sixpack has had to broaden his horizons.

This week, City Pulse returns to speak with Lansing residents who shared their reflections on politics, humanity and war with us one year ago. And, of course, we've added some new voices to the stew.

David Hollister, Lansing mayor

How much has 9/11 influenced your work?

Fundamentally. There isn't a single part of city government that hasn't been impacted. Whether it's worry over anthrax coming through the tax forms, security at City Hall, extra precautions at the zoo, or training more police and firemen. There are monthly meetings with regional leaders that before 9/11 would just happen occasionally.

Hollister

Weren't most of these issues resolved in the first few weeks after the attacks?

No, it hasn't slowed down. We just had a communication summit with non-profits and big businesses like General Motors. One thing we found was that people wanting to give blood or send money didn't know where to call. They're flooding our 911 emergency phone number. So we are looking at information sharing, and the possibility of a 211 non-emergency number if you want to give clothing, or if you want to volunteer.

How much has 9/11 changed your biography?

I discussed with the Attorney General [Jennifer Granholm, the Democratic nominee for governor] what role I would play in a new administration. Through a network of people around the state, I know there's a real frustration about homeland security and coordination. One of the initiatives that a new governor should take is better collaboration between state and local community agencies on homeland security. There isn't a mayor I talked to who can tell you what code we're under today — there's red, orange and other levels of alert. Do we have the same code as Chicago? I can call my police chief right now and ask him what the code is and he probably won't know. That task will be undertaken by the new governor, if it's Granholm. We also hope to be reimbursed. We asked every department how 9/11 impacts their budgets. The Personnel Department does more screening, and so on. If Congress ever passes a reimbursement process for local governments, we will have documented the increased costs.

Last year you told us: "What happens [in the future], I don't know. That depends on the skills and leadership of our national administration." Do you think they did a good job?

I think history will be the judge. Personally I think a more appropriate response would have been to declare Al-Qaida and Bin Laden criminals and then trying to prosecute them through the world court, instead of taking on a generic war on terrorism. When you make such statements as "axis of evil," and identify North-Korea, Iraq and others, you complicate international policy. One of our major allies, Pakistan, has now assumed more dictatorial powers and subverted democratic processes. We are allied with a potential despot who is endangering peace in the region, in a conflict over Kashmir. I think the war in Afghanistan was effective; it appears that we've really dismantled the Al-Qaida network, but I think this could have been done in a more proscribed way, without opening us up for unilateral actions around the world, that over time could isolate us.

How do you feel about the Bush administration announcing a war against Iraq without even asking Congress?

It worries me. I grew up in the 1960s, and I was an anti-war activist. The war in Vietnam was undertaken without public support, and a strong rationale for it was never really made. As bodies started stacking up there were questions that undermined public confidence in the war. I sense that Iraq is not a democratic society, but a unilateral war will not be sustained over time. If we could have an engagement like we had in Kuwait, one which is successful in nation building, we might be successful.

You also said, "Whatever we do will have implications locally." Lansing residents spend \$9 million in tax money on nuclear weapons per year. Since 1980, Michigan sends \$10 billion a year to the Pentagon.

These decisions are not made by mayors, but by Congress and the president. It worries me. We have limited resources and have to use them wisely. Five years ago we were in the process of de-escalating the Cold War, dismantling missile systems. The redirection of money toward urban areas, and toward health care infrastructure investments, seemed to be disengaging a war mentality. Vietnam demonstrated that you can't have both. I worry about this continuous drumbeat for war that is in the media. Initially, there will be public support for it. But unless it's done quickly and wisely the support of Americans and Michiganians probably will evaporate, and we would have the worst of all possible worlds. Local communities who are trying to provide basic services would be forced to either reduce services or raise taxes. And those are very ugly alternatives. Lyndon Johnson said in 1968 that the toughest job in America was not to be the president, but to be mayor of a major city, because people are calling you at home.

You are vice chairman of a group of 12 "urban-core" mayors. Wouldn't it be possible to send a message that you'd spend money on health care, education, and jobs, rather than using it for weapons of mass destruction?

That hasn't been discussed at this point. We have been so focused on providing health and safety that we haven't gotten into the national debate. That might evolve. At this point, it hasn't been on the agenda.

In 2001 you said, "I hope we don't sacrifice our civil liberties as we respond to this." Do you think the Patriot Act poses a real danger to Lansing residents, based on their nationality, ethnicity, or color of skin?

There were no reported cases in Lansing. I think the USA Patriot Act was not as thoughtfully deliberated as most legislation. I worry that Ashcroft is taking the most vigorous interpretation and is not concerned about civil liberties as they have traditionally been understood in this country. In the first time in 30 years, a public ruling criticized the Justice Department and Ashcroft specifically, for 75 gross violations by government, for deceiving and misrepresenting. That was quite an extraordinary act. So I think there is a conflict, and the congressional and presidential elections will revolve around these issues.

Could you imagine the FBI coming in and trying to control the police force in your city?

Mayors worry about these things. I was concerned when the FBI called my office to profile people of Muslim heritage, a small number of 15 people in October 2001. We cooperated, but we worked through the American Civil Liberties Union. If the FBI wants to investigate again they will have to convince us.

Last spring, citizens of Northampton, Mass., (and also Amherst) created a petition to protect town residents from the Bush-Ashcroft USA Patriot Act. A “resolution to defend the Bill of Rights” was passed unanimously by the Northampton City Council. Did you hear about that?

It hasn't been brought to my attention. My guess is Lansing's City Council would not support such a resolution, because it hasn't been a very visible problem in our community. If there were recognized instances of violations, there would be a local response. Most of our focus has been on training. We've created a Unity in Community initiative that deals with building bridges and celebrating diversity. They're helping us organize a remembrance day on 9/11.

That's been the nature of our response. We've asked churches, synagogues and mosques to hold inter-denominational remembrances. We'll have a candlelight service downtown, and members of the various faiths will be involved in prayers and poetry readings — no speeches from politicians. The remembrance will be from various ethnic groups trying to bring understanding, cultural awareness, and collaboration. I hope the group will continue to thrive, come up with new ideas, and do things that further enhance diversity.

Cunningham

Paula Cunningham, president of Lansing Community College

Although things have heightened and there has been a greater awareness since 9/11, there hasn't been much resolution. As we speak, we're talking about the United States going to war. It's a similar situation to 2001, except now we may be the aggressor rather than the victim. Neither position feels very good.

I still have a hard time believing that war is the only available answer. With the intelligence and resources available today, do we really have to resort to something as barbaric and fatalistic as war? Citizens need to know more about what the potential dangers are and how we're threatened if we don't go to war. In absence of that knowledge I reserve passing judgment on anyone who has to make those types of decisions for the entire country. The president has an entire FBI available, and networks all over the world. He supposedly knows more about the world situation than we do.

This is a teaching and learning institution. The more you know about other countries, the more you learn about values and differences, and realize how similar people of other cultures are. Teaching and learning are really a root that helps to bridge future generations.

Hate is built on ignorance, not on the fact that I don't like you. It's because I don't know you. After 9/11, we've integrated more world affairs into our curriculum, which is essential for future peace. We've created opportunities for students and we continuously had open forums to talk about people's feelings. We'll continue that, because how else do you get

to a different level, if you don't express where you are.

9/11 changed me in terms of how I look at all people. I take more time to understand, to value, and to talk. We all have certain friends whom we feel very comfortable with. I find myself also talking more with people who I don't know, just to make certain that there's a certain connection. I find myself listening to my heart more. 9/11 has changed me forever in that I immediately realized what hate can do. Civil War, World War and Cold War – this was always in the past. Russia was our worst enemy when I was a child. But today, we're so firmly removed from reality, to know that we're a world power. There are other countries that want what we have, and want to destroy this power. That's what I mean by hate. If you get the wrong person in power in another country, hate just breeds. I think teaching and learning can affect that.

Hostility of any kind is absolutely not allowed on campus. However, it exists. We have 2,300 faculty staff here and over 19,000 students, and they have different opinions. We've had less than a handful of incidences where students said something full of cursing about other students. We have certified counselors who deal with students and forums where people speak people openly about things said to them. So they were able to respond to verbal assault.

In terms of the USA Patriot Act, no, the FBI didn't call. We work together with Michigan State troopers and have sworn-in police officers on campus, who asked questions after 9/11, because of our aviation program.

McMurray Jefferson, retired Olds worker, Gospel singer and choir director

Jefferson

The only thing that bothers me is you don't know if it's going to happen again. I don't feel comfortable going to large gatherings, even to baseball games. I feel that there's an enemy there that's designed to bring our country down. Sometimes we accuse people who we think are enemies. But a lot of Americans don't really study what's going on. They believe in whatever the television or radio says. I think we should teach our kids to try to get some real news, I mean the truth about what's actually happening. In the past year I was thinking a lot about the terrorists' motives for attacking New York. I believe it was just the idea of fighting back.

Declaring war against Iraq is terrible. How can you go over to another person's house to clean it up, while yours is dirty? I think teaching should be done by presenting an example.

There's no short-term solution, but it's got to start somewhere. To me, it hasn't started, it's getting worse. The people ruling this country don't

care for the lower people – whatever these people do is all right, so long as it doesn't affect them. It's all about money, and the money people tell everybody what to do. Some of the top people make money from evilness every day. But good can accomplish more than evil. There's a real chance to decrease the distance between us and them. I believe 9/11 is going to happen again, because there's no concern about decency and the human side of people.

Tim Barron, radio personality, WMMQ

I believe what I said last year is true. I mentioned that the average Joe six-pack American could no longer be the ignorant American. We've learned a lot about the rest of the world in the last 12 months. People are familiar with the Taliban, and of different kinds of people who wear turbans. The average American is now a lot more understanding that there are many people in the world who have veiled women, but are not terrorists. But we have a lot further to go. George Bush has learned a bit, too. The enormity of learning as the leader of the free world is overwhelming. You need a lot of advisers and a lot of raw experience. He had a pretty wealthy upbringing and still has things to learn.

Barron

I am sure we're going to have a war with Iraq. It's too bad. I wish they could police themselves and get rid of Saddam themselves, but that isn't going to happen.

Because I'm in the media, 9/11 has to play a larger role in my life. If I weren't, it would be in the background, sort of like a soundtrack. I don't think that the average American has continued with the intensity that was there in the first six months when everybody was flying an American flag. There were a lot of instant patriots. But the flags are all down and I guess that's probably for the better.

It's unfortunate that Arabs are being discriminated against. But that's been going on a long time. You heard about "sandman" and "towheads" and all the other derogatory terms since the '60s and '70s. People who are ignorant are always going to be ignorant. It's their lack of intelligence. It's frustrating to try to change ignorant people. But even the biggest IGNORAMUS out there would have to understand after this year of coverage, that there are lots of people that look just like terrorists, who are really mad at the terrorists. And that's a good thing!

Discrimination and violence against a group of people is one thing, but profiling is another. I'm pretty pro profiling. If you look at the folks who blew up the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and killed the people on the airliners — they were all young men, obviously Middle Eastern. I don't mind if I get profiled. As a guy with a ponytail flying to Florida, I was always profiled. I looked like a drug dealer.

I think 9/11 shows that we pay the admission price to be a real world power, with real world problems.

Kathie Kuhn, People for a Positive Social Change

Kuhn

When I first heard about 9/11, my immediate response was “Oh my God, what is our government going to do now to whom” – based on the administration and the history of our foreign policy, which is completely brutal, self-serving and full of war. My first thought wasn’t “those poor people from New York!” And I think I wasn’t alone. I’ve spoken to other people who felt the exact same thing.

My wake-up call was the Gulf War, when I started to first question the government. And here the Army was bombing people of Afghanistan who had nothing to do with it. Shortly after 9/11 we organized a couple of marches. In March 2002, there were 207 people. We went from MSU to the Capitol. Both times we got an awful lot of positive response, but the media was stating that the huge majority of people wanted to go after the people of Afghanistan. Well, that’s simply not true.

I speak with a lot of people on the bus or on the streets. I’ve hardly talked to a soul who likes George Bush. At the same time, he has great approval ratings in the polls. But only 20 percent of the polls say we want this war to happen. So much of what I hear through corporate media is just a lie.

There are more African-American males in prison in Michigan than there are in higher education. If this would happen in any other country we’d call it apartheid. Also: a right-wing government stole the election. Look at that. It’s the truth! People are just starting to wake up.

We need to hold the corporate media accountable to what they say. We also need to work with elementary schools to really discuss this kind of racism. My honest answer would be anarchism. Anything would be better than what we have now. A 3-year-old child could come up with a better answer than just killing everybody. It’s the very planet we live on, the air we breathe. We need to take to the streets. There have been two general strikes in the country, one of them was in Lansing. It’s time again. I’m really at the point where I just can’t bear it any longer. It’s breaking my heart. We’re pushing over the edge in World War III. As far as I’m concerned that’s not ok. I’m personally willing to do whatever nonviolence is necessary to prevent that.

Annabel Dwyer, attorney and adjunct professor in human rights and

humanitarian law at Cooley Law School

It's proven to be true that 9/11 is being used to build up the military and to undermine international treaties. I think to go from a \$300 billion to a \$400 billion military budget is very indicative. Instead of trying to figure out what happened on Sept. 11, instead of admitting that we have a good many of the same problems, in the use of weapons of mass destruction — we're in fact the great masters, we try to prove that the United States controlling these weapons is the solution. Since 1945, with everyone in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, our weapons of mass destruction are somehow good, whereas everyone else's are somehow evil. This makes no sense. At the time, the United States is trying to get immunity from the International Court of Justice. We want to be able to commit war crimes. So what's wrong with what Saddam Hussein is doing?

Dwyer

From what I understand the U.S. military is already poised for an attack of Iraq. Essentially, we're using Saddam Hussein because we can't find Osama Bin Laden to justify a huge military build-up. When you kick the military budget up, you need to figure out justifications for this expenditure. We've already destroyed the infrastructure of Iraq. This was terrorism, just like the bombing of Afghanistan was.

The director of the organization that monitors the chemical weapons for the U.N. very newly convinced Saddam Hussein to join the treaty, and this eliminated one of the Bush administration's rationales for attacking Iraq. We got him kicked out. This is a direct undermining of the inspection regime's convention. To say Saddam used chemical weapons against his own people is not a rationale. The U.S. knew when Saddam Hussein was using chemical weapons against the Kurds. Not only that, The New York Times had only half of the story. The other half is that we actually supplied some of the chemicals used by Saddam Hussein. Why would you go after him then? There is no legal justification. All you can figure is that there are certain corporations that are gaining a lot from this military build-up.

I think the fact that there is no question about the underlying assumption that we must replace or kill Saddam Hussein is very shocking. It should be shocking for all Americans. The former secretary of state, James Baker, is claiming we must eliminate people who threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. Well, we have 10,000 nuclear weapons. What does that mean? This is very seriously fascist.

Somebody has to stand up against it, certainly not Congress. This Congress has always been ineffective. There's some great Mark Twain essays on patriotism. Carl Levin is the head of the armed service committee — he has a couple of good staff people who are completely overwhelmed by the military push. Grassroots activists and reporters need to find out what

corporations are directly funding weapons and tactics of mass destructions. That was done systematically during Vietnam.

We pay taxes that go into a \$400 billion military budget. That's why there's a deficit in the state, that's why education isn't funded, that's why people haven't figured out a way to say these are unacceptable things.

There are peace demonstrations all over the United States. "Drop Bush, not bombs." But these are rarely reported in the news. It's very difficult to do grassroots organizing now in the United States. Very few people can afford to do this work full-time. In the 1960s a lot of people were directly affected by Vietnam. We were involved in anti-bombing marches after 9/11. I spoke at two university teach-ins in which there were 600 students. We only saw a few pictures of Afghan refugees in The New York Times, and a few figures about how many people were driven out and what their conditions were. With Vietnam we saw every day what was going on. And exactly the same happened in Iraq - we had no reporting. How do we know how seven million refugees from Afghanistan look like after 20 years of war? Or a million-and-a-half refugees look after the tirade of U.S. bombing?

The Patriot Act has brought more lawyers out to say, "Hey, what's going on here." The American Bar Association finally said something about detaining a bunch of people without letting anyone know.

The business of harassing Muslim students, and foreign students in general, is something I was very concerned about. Genice Rhodes-Reed of the Human Relations Department and Community Services was doing a lot of that work. Why Mayor Hollister would fire her is still a mystery. Right after 9/11, when the house next to the mosque was shot, the neighborhood organized community relations. There was a lot of support. But the FBI told people, "If you don't cooperate, that means you're guilty." Organizing resistance becomes very difficult, because of the subtle nature of oppression.

The people now in power are exactly those who were in power in the 1970s. The tradition goes back to the people who dropped our nuclear weapons. The attempt is to transfer communism to terrorism. We have a rightist militaristic strain in conjunction with short-term profits from corporations. There's no doubt about it. There's always been a struggle between people who build and believe in freedom and democracy, and those who campaign for private property, and military and corporate robber gangs. I think we have to do a lot more locally to make people realize it's insane. We have to point out that this massive military solution is highly destructive, dangerous, expensive, and undercutting our own educational and health care system.

Jose and Manuela Castilla of Lansing:

Jose: 9/11 changed our lives, because before we didn't pay too much attention to the news. We do now. We want to know what's going on in the world. We want to know if we lost any boys over there, or if terrorists have been caught. One of my nephews is in the Air Force. He was sent to Afghanistan, but he's back home in Arizona. There are others who serve in the Marines, but they're all safe. Although I never served in the Army, I think this is a lot like Vietnam. You don't know who your enemies are. In the Army right now there are young men in the 20s. I think this is young. I was young in World War II, but I still remember a lot of things. I remember a captain had to be 30 some years old. And now I see a kid on TV – captain so and so is 23 years old. That's too young!

Jose and Manuela Castilla

Manuela: I lost my younger brother during Vietnam. It might not be my brothers now who are in danger, because they're too old, but we've got nephews coming up in these ages. 9/11 didn't stop us traveling, though. In November 2001 we flew to Florida, where we have a condo, and we flew there the following February. We decided if it's going to happen it's going to happen!

Jose: We don't want to let these people scare us, because that's exactly what they want. They want us to be afraid, not to move, not to get out of our house to look out of the window. There's always been racial discrimination in America, not only against Arab people, but also to the Mexicans. I have nothing against the Arabs, the only thing I have against them is they raise the price of gas all the time, and they own most of the gas stations around here (on Cedar).

After the terrorist attacks people really became more friendly to other people. Before it very frequently happened that people didn't talk to their neighbors, because they were black or Mexican. I don't agree with the USA Patriot Act, because we're all Americans and we're all the same. I think what the world leaders got to do is get together more, and talk more. Leave your guns at home and get a pencil and paper!

Carmen Electra Paradise, singer

The Patriot Act is a very frightening thing. It's something that the Bush family has been trying to push for years. It takes away so many of our civilian freedoms without even protecting as far as terrorism goes. A lot of it is propaganda.

We are planning to raise awareness with a zine project we're working on,

called "Focus." The first issue we're doing will focus on the Patriot Act, the second one on the rise of corporations and the fall of independently owned businesses. We're trying to focus on different political ideas per issue. We hand out flyers before we put the issue out, to get people educated and aware about what we're focusing on. We encourage people to write us letters and articles, because at home people don't even know what's going on and really don't even care. It helps to get the word out.

Hopefully we will have a petition going so that we can say "we want Lansing to repeal the Patriot Act." I'm optimistic and I think Lansing has enough open-minded people. We're an open-source project. If people want to write for us, they can send an e-mail to imafocused@hotmail.com.

Care to respond? Send letters to letters@city-pulse.org. View our Letters policy.

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