

Opinions & Views

Kilpatrick Responds

I can't tell you how disappointed I was to read the inaccurate and misleading story about my Police Pursuit and Rescue Support Act in this week's Michigan Citizen (Nov 8-14, 1998).

The story badly skewed the intent of legislation I introduced last year to help avoid needless police pursuit fatalities and assist local police departments in cases of severe emergencies. Your story pointedly suggested that I introduced the bill in order to protect corporate assets at the expense of my constituents. Those who know me, know better.

First, let me fully explain the genesis of my introduction of this bill. I wrote the bill after two of my constituents were killed when they were innocent bystanders during local police chases. The bill is designed to reduce dangerous police chases by making helicopters available to local police departments. In 1996, 377 persons nationwide were killed as a result of high-speed pursuits, with 107 of these fatalities being occupants of other, uninvolved vehicles or innocent bystanders.

A cursory examination of the Congressional Record (easily available from my office or on the Internet) would have fully revealed the intent of the legislation - to seek a reasonable and workable solution to the challenge of high-speed pursuits. I am surprised and angered that your writer did not exercise basic reporting skills in the compilation of this story.

The story went on to suggest that contributions I received during my 1996 campaign somehow influenced my decision to sponsor the legislation. I thought you knew me better than that. I don't work for General Motors. I work for the citizens of the 15th District. Any legislation that I introduced will be for the good of the citizens of the 15th District.

This story was particularly damaging because it was published by the Michigan Citizen. As print media struggles to reinvent itself, readers will

increasingly rely on the perspective of black-owned media outlets for news. I have always had a good relationship with your newspaper, and I am profoundly disappointed that your reporter did not even bother to contact our office before printing the story. His assertion that "numerous" phone calls to my staff went unreturned is patently false.

I encourage you to ask Mr.

Long-Bey to whom he spoke in my office and when. My district office has caller id and my staff keeps a copious log of incoming phone calls. I assure you that he never once attempted to contact me or any of my staff members. My entire career has been dedicated to protecting the interests of the constituents I serve. Few would question my dedication to the African American community. I am

discouraged that the Michigan Citizen, an institution that should be a lifeline for important information to the black community, would risk its credibility with such shoddy reporting.

I hope you print this letter. More importantly, I hope that in the future your newspaper is more responsible in its coverage of Congressional issues.

CAROLYN C. KILPATRICK

Comments of the Honorable CAROLYN C. KILPATRICK in the House of Representatives WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1997

Ms. KILPATRICK: Mr. Speaker, today, along with Congressman Martin Frost and Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald, I am introducing the Police Pursuit and Rescue Support Act.

This legislation is very simple: it will allow for our financially strapped police departments to utilize Department of Defense helicopters and other equipment to pursue felons or rescue citizens.

High-speed police pursuits are an unfortunate consequence of the very difficult job that our local police officers must do everyday. In 1996, 377 persons nationwide were killed as a result of these high-speed pursuits, with 107 of these fatalities being occupants of other, uninvolved vehicles or innocent bystanders.

Two persons in my congressional district have died as a result of these high-speed pursuits this year. Their deaths inspired me to seek a reasonable and workable solution to this challenge.

Helicopters have been shown to be a more cost-effective and efficient device in high-speed pursuits. However, the high expense to purchase and maintain a helicopter is prohibitive to many local police departments.

The Police Pursuit and Rescue Support Act will allow local police departments to utilize helicopters or any other equipment from the local Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard branch to pursue fleeing criminals or rescue citizens. Upon the submission to the Department of Defense of high-speed pursuit and rescue guidelines by the local police department the Department of Defense will make helicopters and other equipment available, with a pilot and maintenance person, free of charge, to the local police department. This would be a mutually agreeable arrange-

ment: the local police department and the local Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, or Navy base both must conclude that this arrangement is practical, feasible, and financially responsible.

The Police Pursuit and Rescue Support Act is a voluntary program that allows local police departments to draft their high-speed pursuit and rescue guidelines, submit these to the Department of Defense, and upon approval of these guidelines, work with their local branch of the Department of Defense to establish exactly how, when, and where this emergency equipment would be used.

Each local police department would have the flexibility to design and develop their own high-speed pursuit guidelines.

As a former elected Michigan State legislator, I am sensitive to mandates in a one-size-fits-all fashion coming from Washington, DC, and stringently avoided any such prerequisites in the Police Pursuit and Rescue Support Act. Finally, the bill will make Department of Defense equipment available for the rescue of citizens.

Many of our cities have high-rise office buildings that are inaccessible by the longest hook and ladder fire trucks.

There are those accidents and catastrophes that are only accessible by the high technology, advanced vehicles available to our armed services. It only makes sense for our financially strapped police departments to have access to that equipment, already paid for by taxpayer dollars to safely pursue criminals and rescue citizens.

My bill gives local police departments the flexibility to design policies that will protect citizens, police officers and save taxpayers untold sums in wrongful death lawsuits.

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