

## Short-Story Legislators: Fiction or Sensationalism?

### To the Editor:

I realize that Robert Nelson's second-place winning entry in the recent short-story contest ("The Shadow from the Wall," August 2009) is fiction; still, the misrepresentations made about Michigan's legislators were egregiously sensationalistic. Worse yet, they might stir up more than the usual cynicism that haunts our democracy. So I thought I should step forward to clear things up.

I served in the Michigan House for a decade and was on the Republican leadership team for most of that time. I never saw any of the following in either party, much as the Nelson piece would suggest they are commonplace:

- Legislators whose re-election depends solely on a bill passing. Frank Landis, the fictional representative at the heart of the story, thought "his legislative career was probably over" because his anti-illegal immigrant bill was stuck in committee. Such pressure certainly does not exist in the real world; like it or not, most incumbents are easily re-elected

regardless of their success in getting bills passed.

- Legislators who blatantly solicit or knowingly receive huge amounts of money from a single interest group as a direct quid pro quo for favorable action on legislation. Landis receives a promise of \$60,000 from one family (!) if he would amend his bill to their liking. Even legislators with the most suspect fundraising techniques would find this account unrealistic and offensive, and I doubt whether anyone in Lansing has ever received such a huge amount from one family.
- Legislators who murder someone in cold blood to help secure passage of a bill. Landis kills an illegal immigrant worker and frames him as a burglar just to generate the media attention he needs to move his bill. Give me a break.

Nelson says in the *Journal's* prefatory article that Landis is "a personification of several legislators I have known over the years." I doubt it, but if he actually knows of such law breakers, he should certainly contact a prosecutor.

**Hon. Richard A. Bandstra, Grand Rapids**

### Response from the Author

I note that a work of fiction need not portray the "commonplace," as Judge Bandstra suggests, but that, in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fiction reveals truth that reality obscures."

I would be happy to turn over any fictional "law breakers" to whatever authorities Judge Bandstra deems appropriate.

**Robert B. Nelson, Lansing**

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