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To paraphrase the Wallendas: Never look down

By Ron Kitchens

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All the fanfare of Michigan's Jan. 15 presidential primary has passed. So, too, have the presidential candidates come and gone through our state.

While it seems that Michigan's attempt at garnering national prominence by moving up its primary date fell short of its desired goal, it did, for a brief week or so, put Michigan at the center of the media world. Unfortunately I'm not sure if Michigan got exactly what it wanted.

Not only was it pointed out repeatedly on national television that Michigan had purposely chosen to make itself inconsequential by its decision to move up its primary date - thus receiving the punishment of being stripped of all its Democratic delegates and half its Republican delegates at their respective national presidential candidate selection primaries - but the current economic situation that Michigan finds itself in was spotlighted in a way that seems to parallel more not-so-well-thought-out choices and archaic thought processes.

And the candidates seemed to reverberate that same pervasive feeling.

One candidate talked of reinventing Michigan and regaining our once-vibrant economy. While another candidate scolded that candidate and a lot of us for our optimism and told us that we would have to get used to having less, that greatness was not coming back our way.

It was amazing the number of calls I received in that short span of time from friends around the country who called in shock about the things that were being said about Michigan by the candidates and television pundits. On one occasion, the screen stated that the reporter was in Kalamazoo, while in actuality it was showing video of shuttered buildings in downtown Detroit.

While it is much too easy to close our eyes and pretend that we aren't in our current situation, I am going to keep my eyes wide open, focus ahead and never look down. Actually my vision for a future reminds me of the philosophy of the Flying Wallenda family. Allow me to digress

Back in the day, when I was a kid with a limited world view and three television channels, one of my favorite television shows was ABC's Wide World of Sports. For those of you who do not remember this show, each week the host, Jim McKay, brought into our

homes glimpses of such exotic sporting events as luge racing, surfing tournaments, the Harlem Globetrotters, lumberjack competitions and ... the Flying Wallendas.

Each time the show featured the Wallendas, it went into great detail about the remarkable "firsts" this family had achieved in their storied history. But they went into even greater detail about the tragedies that had befallen them.

As a kid, I always wondered, "Why not quit?" How, with all of the terrible things that had happened in their past, could these people stand on a thin wire hundreds of feet in the air, with no safety net and make it look so easy?

I remember reading an interview a few years ago in which a member of the Wallenda family was asked the nearly exact question that I had wondered as a child. He was asked how he managed to make walking in midair on a thin wire look so easy.

Mr. Wallenda stated that essentially the key is to keep your eyes fixed to where you are going, never be distracted. Never look down. Where your head goes, that is where your body will go. Looking down is a sure way to fail.

It seems to me that Michigan is a lot like the Flying Wallendas. We have had some pretty terrible things befall us. And like the Wallendas, we have little choice but to cross the chasm, knowing that the trip across the wire will be scary. But if we keep our heads up and look forward, in the end greatness will be ours.

I guess this brings us back to those candidates and their different visions for Michigan. Well, since they and their media gurus are now history, I think I will just keep emulating the Flying Wallendas and never look down, keep moving forward and believe soon greatness will be at the end of the walk.

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