



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Housing Patterns Lie At Heart Of Bussing Issue

The degree to which cross-district bussing has permeated political and business decisions in this area is a good index of the emotional power of the issue.

A realtor from Plymouth told me the other day that he expected his business to boom because Plymouth seems to be outside the area for suburban bussing that Judge Roth is talking about. Some homeowners from other suburbs, unwilling at any cost to see their children bussed into Detroit, my source reports, will sell their present homes and move to Plymouth.

The Livonia school district, torn by factionalism on the board, got itself together last week and sent two school busses on a 40-minute ride to Detroit to help build a case against bussing on the grounds that it is too expensive and unfairly penalizes the kids being bussed by excessively long rides.

The school millage election in the Wayne-Westland school district ended with a slim six vote plurality for the millage, despite district voters' past record for support for education. In this election and on Monday's vote on 3.5 mills for operating funds in the Farmington School District, the dominant issue has been bussing.

THE ARGUMENT is simple: Why should we, the voters in suburban school districts, vote to tax ourselves to support local schools when it might be that in a short time our system will be buried with Detroit's.

I happen to think it's a poor argument on two counts: 1) Why should we penalize our children's schooling now in response to the fear that there may be bussing some time in the future? 2) If local voters won't support their own school system, the only alternative is for the state to support them; if the state puts up the money for local school systems, the idea of local control is gone forever.

However, the emotional power of the bussing issue is so strong that these counter arguments often fall on deaf ears.

It's like an old City Editor once said about his staff of reporters: "We want to cover this city like a bad smell."

THERE ARE TWO oddities about the development of the bussing issue so far.

First has been the position of suburban liberals, i.e., those people who could have been expected to be sympathetic to the key problem bussing is supposed to solve - segregated

and unequal schools. Liberals holding elected offices have ducked the issue as much as possible, understanding quite well that the overwhelming majority of their constituents are against bussing.

But even the private citizen liberals with no elected office to protect or political ambitions to nurture have not been strong supporters of the bussing idea. I suspect that at bottom, they too are worried about the safety of their children, the length of the bus ride, and the quality of whatever school their children might be bussed into.

SECOND IS that virtually no one - for bussing or against it or agonizedly ambivalent - has been talking much about the gut of the issue, which is not education but housing.

The reason schools are segregated is that housing is segregated. The reason inner city schools are bad and suburban schools are good is that inner city residents are not as rich and therefore do not pay as much taxes to support schools as suburbanites.

As long as housing patterns are segregated, schools are going to be segregated, and as

long as that's the case there will be pressure from the courts for bussing plans.

At this stage in the development of the debate, it might be useful for the many suburban residents who are responsibly opposed to bussing to think through what can be done to integrate housing.

If a sensible integrated housing plan could be worked out to take effect quickly and widely, the neighborhood school under local control could be saved and bussing made unnecessary.

Tim Richard writes

Why Not Put Bussing To Its Greatest Use?

There was an old Walt Disney movie with a song about a "Laughing Place," and it advised, "Take a frown, turn it upside down..."

The movie is now considered racist, but the advice is still good. If something appears to be a liability or a danger, look at it another way and it will be an asset and an opportunity. That's the philosophy of the Lake Kenwood Surf and Turf Club members, who are turning their super-puddle into an object of great mirth.

The same kind of positive thinking could help us out in the bussing situation. Suburban opinion is probably 10 to 1 against cross-district bussing to achieve racial balance, but if bussing's opponents would reconsider, they could use the possibility of bussing to great advantage.

Figure it out. The bussing plans submitted to Federal Judge Stephen Roth generally call for a 70-30 or 80-20 white-black balance. In other words, only about 25 per cent of

suburban kids would be transported in any one year.

BUT WHICH KIDS? Somehow, if there is to be bussing, someone has got to make a decision as to which kids leave the hallowed neighborhood school. A lottery is a simple but unimaginative way of doing it. There are better ways.

Is smoking a problem in school? Well, bus the kids who get caught smoking.

Are the kids' hairdos greasy, their jeans cruddy, their general appearances unsavory and unsanitary? Well, make an announcement that those 25 per cent worst appearing students will make the long ride down to Cooley High.

Vandalism -- there's a tremendous problem in suburbia, especially in junior highs. So let's make a tally at all the junior highs in town, and the school with the greatest damage rate will have the greatest number of its pupils transported.

Any student strikes lately? Assign a higher export rate to that school.

Poor response to your school's Earth Week project? Well...

Get the idea?

THE ADVANTAGES are numerous, and the whole concept is so logical that it probably won't be adopted, but let's run through them anyway:

School boards could pretty much repeal the dress codes, which are unpopular with students because they represent petty coercion.

Students would have an incentive - that is, a positive reason for behaving - instead of the essentially negative kinds of discipline our schools still employ.

Parents, who oppose bussing even more strenuously than the kids, would quit neglecting them in their efforts to keep their youngsters out of (ugh!) Detroit.

In general, we would be exporting our problems, an action that would upgrade the general department in our schools. You can't knock that.

FINALLY, THERE'S a legal point. Increasingly, parents are hiring tough lawyers to defend Johnny when he gets in trouble, and often they're winning. But in a legal sense, bussing someone to Detroit couldn't be considered punishment, so the legal beagles would have nothing to appeal if a smoking, dirty, destructive Johnny is

shipped off. School authority couldn't be challenged.

"Take a frown, turn it upside down..."

R. J. Thompson writes

Will Farmington Millage Defeat Become Area Trend?

Defeat of the 3.5 school millage issue in Farmington Monday appears to be a sign that school boards in Observerland - and for that matter, throughout the state as well as the United States - are going to meet resistance to all millage proposals.

Farmington had one of the largest voter turnouts in years for a school issue. Those close to the trend of elections predicted that a large vote could mean a "No," and that's exactly the way it turned out.

Of course, there is the matter of 3.5 new mills, meaning an increase in the taxes of every property owner in the Farmington school district, and it is well known that most electors are taking a dim view of increased tax payments.

Sense And Nonsense

Graffiti has it that Mrs. Irene McCabe has some calloused views on bussing.

Be that as it may, but one Detroit newspaper reporter's account of her arrival into a large Ohio city revealed that not everyone knows who Mrs. McCabe is or why she is marching to Washington.

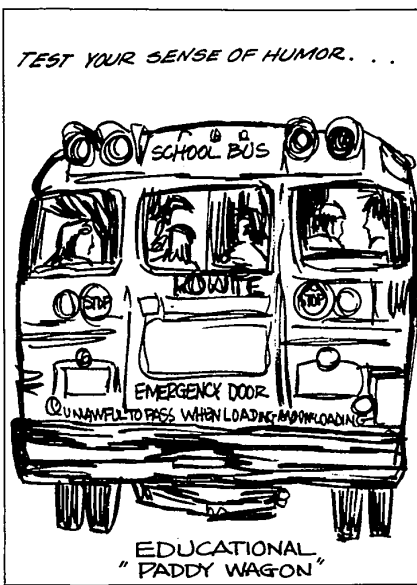
According to the newspaper account, a group of Ohioans watched as the weary group plodded down the highway, followed by their two house trailers. Among the spectators were some small children.

Overheard was one youngster asking: "Who is she?"

The answer: "Someone selling trailers, I think."

From the mouths of babes

Maybe the opposition should begin following the trailers with a couple of school busses.



ONE WOULD HAVE to say that the Farmington issue had only a slight chance of passing, even though those in favor staged a tremendous drive during the past three weeks to get support.

When more than 10,000 go to the polls and the issue loses by only 205 votes, then it appears as if the work of those in favor had excellent results. But unfortunately not good enough to overcome the built-in "no" group.

The big thing is that the Farmington election may be the trend for all such polls in Observerland. It means that there is a voter revolt against increased taxes and even against the renewal of millage.

For instance, the Wayne - Westland School district had a recent vote on millage renewal, and it barely received support, passing by a margin of six votes. That result is being contested, and a recount will be made. It could be that the renewal will lose in the recount; after all, six votes aren't many and could be rubbed out in a recheck of the absentee ballots alone.

IT WILL BE recalled that the Farmington board asked the electors for approval of a 3.5 additional mills a year ago and the proposal was turned down.

However, during the campaign, the board emphasized that failure of the millage would result in cutbacks including the extra-curricular activities... sports, band and the like.

This was repeated time and again by board members during the campaign to get favorable votes. Folks were well aware of the cutbacks that would be made. Trustees didn't make the program reductions a threat, but simply told voters that there would be no money, and such things cost quite a bit.

There isn't any question that the campaign hit home because several outstanding high school athletes transferred to other states when the millage failed. They wanted to play football, basketball, baseball and all of the other sports, and Farmington wouldn't have any starting last fall.

But at the same time board members were warning of the effects of failure of the millage to pass, a group of parents was talking to trustees with a proposal to raise the funds necessary to carry on the sports and music programs.

Within two days after the millage defeat, board members agreed to accept the offer of the citizens group to raise the necessary funds.

This despite warning from many close to the board that such an acceptance would make voters question the credibility of the trustees in the future.

One doesn't hear speech after speech telling of cutbacks in programs if an issue fails and then two days later have the trustee refuted by an extraordinary agreement.

PERHAPS THE FEELING in Farmington is that if the citizens group financed certain programs during this school year, then it follows, why can't they continue in the future... for instance like for the next school year?

Regardless of how one feels, the defeat in Farmington, which follows one in Northville and in Pontiac, makes things look rather gloomy for any other school district requesting new millage or renewals.

Requests are certain to come from Livonia, Plymouth and Redford Township in the not too distant future which makes one wonder will Farmington and Northville defeats set the pattern?

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

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The Livonia Observer - The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer - The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer - The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Bingham Farms.