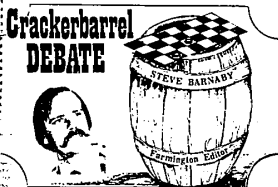


editorial opinion



Regionalism is best idea for the future

The ostrich lifted its head out of the sand pile at the corner of Orchard Lake and Eleven Mile roads this week.

Farmington Hills residents probably won't notice the change right away, but the folks up at city hall have decided to join the majority of communities in the seven-county region by throwing the city's lot in with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG).

For those of you who feel like yawning or who are outraged, just listen a moment and then make up your minds. For some reason, SEMCOG sparks strange reactions in many persons. Most don't understand the purpose of the voluntary regional planning organization and fear it. Others just don't give a hoot.

But it's an important concept for such a rapidly developing area as southeast Michigan. We're developing so quickly and communities' interests are so deeply intertwined that it's essential to have coordinated planning.

SEMCOG does just that. Unfortunately, Farmington Hills has been deprived of its voting power in the past because of provincial attitudes held by the majority of councilmembers.

MANY OPPONENTS feel that along with the acceptance of regional governance comes the threat of loss of local control.

That's bunk. In reality, a regional organization gives each community the opportunity to develop its own area with the help of cities around the region.

Let's face it, gang. A community just can't get along by itself when such common problems exist as housing, transportation, land use and water.

Water usage alone should drive every suburbanite into SEMCOG's corner, considering the problems that have developed between the city of Detroit and the surrounding communities.

Even Ms. Local Control herself, Mayor Joan Dukey, for many years an opponent of regionalism, now admits that joining SEMCOG is a wise move even if it is just to vote "no" on all the SEMCOG proposals.

Obstructionists hit water plan

It's apparent that leaders of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments have a strong disposition to set up a new Area Water Quality Board as the mechanism for seven-county coordination and monitoring of anti-pollution programs.

It's a reasonable position, although we would have preferred to see SEMCOG itself step into the role instead of setting up a new body.

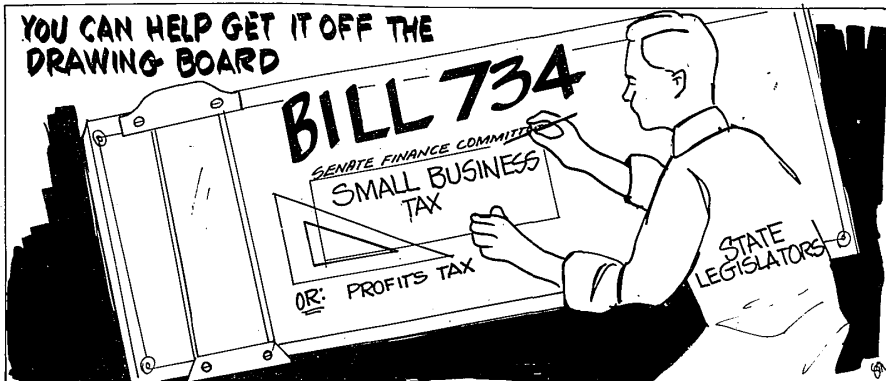
The issue is now heading for the SEMCOG General Assembly meeting of Oct. 20 after passing the executive committee last week.

At this point, SEMCOG leaders and members must beware of a plan of obstruction and amendment aimed at derailing the entire project. Washtenaw County's representatives to SEMCOG are positively fanatical if not hysterical in their opposition. They are making a bizarre alliance with a few hard-shell conservatives from Oakland County—the kind of people who see any regional structure as some kind of hobgoblin.

SEMCOG leaders who have drafted the plan have given the voluntary regional planning agency about half the appointments to the 27-member water quality board. The obstructionists are likely to want to reduce that number by flapping the red herring of "local control."

The plain logic of the matter is that it's senseless for SEMCOG to be a planning agency, but for its water quality plan to be carried out by another body that lacks heavy SEMCOG input.

YOU CAN HELP GET IT OFF THE DRAWING BOARD



SBT reform faces crucial senate vote

"The Single Business Tax is the rape of the small businessmen of this world. It's the single most horrendous tax they ever stuck us with."

Those are harsh words. They come from a small businessman here in the suburbs, Larry Troy, who runs the South-Eight Shell service station at Southfield and Eight Mile roads.

When the SBT took effect at the end of 1976, Larry (and countless other small businessmen like him) discovered he was in deep trouble. His accountant told him the SBT replaced a set of state business taxes based essentially on profits with one tax based essentially on payroll.

Larry's business is labor-intensive; that is, a high percentage of his total costs are in employee payroll. Compared with his previous tax bill, SBT would have doubled Larry's taxes.

Larry Troy then did the only thing he could do. He cut 10 men from his staff of 25, cut back on service, and dropped the AAA work which he had been doing for 10 years.

BECAUSE OF THE Single Business Tax, Larry Troy today is doing less business than he wants to (in a state whose basic economic problem is lack of business growth) and employing 10 fewer persons than he used to (in a state whose greatest human problem is lack of jobs).

Larry Troy's experience is an ideal example of

Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER

why the SBT, as presently written, is dumb-headed and should be amended.

Gov. Milliken and the Michigan Legislature began to get that message late last year, when the bureaucrats finally got around to telling folks what the new SBT really meant. The storm of protest eventually resulted in a commission chaired by Lt. Gov. James Damman which held hearings all over the state.

Lots of people (including yours truly) testified SBT was unfair (because it is not based on ability to pay), regressive (because it is based on payroll, not profit), and misdirected (because it offers a disincentive for businesses to employ people).

The commission deliberated and concluded that the SBT needed amendment, but couldn't agree on what kinds of changes were needed.

AT LAST, legislation to amend the SBT is on the floor of the legislature.



There are two main approaches.

One, apparently favored by the House of Representatives, would in effect have people continue paying the SBT as now set up but provide a complex set of exemptions, depending on relative gross sales, labor-intensive, and earnings of the businessman-owner.

The other, favored by the Senate Finance Committee, would change the basic structure of the SBT so that small businesses (with sales of under \$5 million, with owners' salary plus profits less than \$75,000) would have the option of paying either the SBT or paying a simple profits tax.

Plainly, the senate option is the better one. It is simple; it bases the tax on a small businessman's ability to pay (that is, his profits); it does not tax payroll in the way SBT does, and hence would provide an incentive for small businesses to provide more jobs.

Best word from Lansing is the senate will pass the finance committee's version and the house will stick with its version. That means the ultimate decision will be made in a conference committee. All this will probably happen very soon.

I urge everybody who is sore at the SBT to contact his or her state legislator, urge support for Senate Bill 734.

It's one of those rare occasions when the voice of a justly sore public can have a real effect.

Will we ever see a rapid transit system?

The metropolitan Detroit area has been the last major metropolitan area in the country to face up to the need of a regional mass rapid transportation system.

Because it is the car capital, it has always placed its transportation emphasis on expressways and downtown parking lots.

It has had rail transportation from Pontiac to Detroit and Ann Arbor to Detroit but only at peak time—rush hour. Anyone working in Detroit other than 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. has serious difficulty trying to use this transportation.

Over the years we have had several bus lines serving the suburbs, but the use has been so minimal that private enterprise was unable to earn enough to stay in business.

In 1957 the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) was created to tie together existing modes of transportation and plan a regional system to serve the needs of all the citizens of a six-county area of Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw, St. Clair, and Monroe. Livingston County was added in 1974.

This authority didn't really become operational until 1973 when the state provided funds to match federal grants which had been unavailable since 1964 for capital assistance.

In 1975 the federal government began making operational funds available on a matching basis.



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

This relatively new authority started its regional operation by acquiring a series of private bus companies that had been serving the suburbs.

The bus system won't be complete until the old Detroit Department of Street Railways (DSR) now called the Detroit Department of Transportation (DOT), is merged into the operation.

This has taken quite a lot of time because of the political and financial problems of merging two large segments together. This merger should occur within the next two years.

SEMTA has also acquired the rolling stock of the Grand Trunk Western commuter train service and operates a commuter train service on weekdays from the northern suburbs to Detroit.

Thus far, all SEMTA has accomplished in its 10 years' existence, is the tying together of what already existed, plus a small bus system for

elderly and handicapped persons and local travel service where regular bus lines don't exist.

The small bus systems are mostly "demand-responsive" which the public calls "Dial-a-Ride." The main chore facing SEMTA is what to do about the future.

Detroit would line a subway system plus a people-mover downtown. A people mover would be a monorail system similar to that in use at Disneyland. It would circle the downtown Detroit business district above the streets.

The suburbs want a rapid transit system to get their residents not only to Detroit quickly but also east and west in the metropolitan area.

To build such a system is beyond the present financial capabilities of the authority, so there will be compromises.

Because the present use of regional transportation is not heavy, SEMTA faces the problem of how much to build. Will a full-blown system attract new users, making a larger plan desirable? Will the energy shortage push more people to public transportation and hence create a greater need? Can the authority do such an outstanding service and promotion job that more people can be attracted to public transportation?

All these problems should be solved in the next 15 years, but compromises never satisfy everybody.

Secret court sessions — a history of evil

It has been doubly surprising—and disappointing—for us to receive letters and some public response defending a court-imposed gag rule on coverage of the morals cases against the Rev. Gary Berthiaume in Farmington.

One source of disappointment is that some persons support the alien notion of secret court proceedings. The second source of disappointment is that this occurs only a year after the United States of America observed, with patriotic fanfare and some commercialism, its 200th anniversary as a nation.

Those who would fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

THE LESSON of history is that, wherever there are abuses of a person's right to a fair trial, secrecy is frequently a key ingredient.

The Declaration of Independence indicted King George III of Great Britain "for transporting us beyond the Seas, to be tried for pretended offenses."

Not only was it an abuse of a free people's rights to be tried by non-local judges, but the oceanic distance between the people and the court constituted an effective "gag rule." The people were denied the opportunity to observe the court at work, and so the court could abuse their rights.

That's how the Founding Fathers saw it.

THE ENGLAND which the Pilgrims and Puritans left in the 1620s had a procedure known as "star chamber" proceedings. Just the name should make any literate person shudder.

The star chamber was a judicial committee of the king's governing council. Its original purpose was to hear cases involving private armies of the nobility, but in time it began to lean on the common people, too.

The star chamber's abuses of power were made possible by only one thing—secrecy. It was abolished in 1640.

The Holy Office in 14th and 15th century France and Spain has contributed another term that makes readers of history shudder—Inquisition.

The Inquisition forced persons to testify against themselves. The Inquisition decided what to charge persons with at the end of the proceedings, not the beginning. The Inquisition failed to let the defendant confront and cross-examine his accusers. The Inquisition tortured its victims into confessing.

And the Inquisition operated in secrecy. Such an office couldn't maltreat people unless it operated in secrecy.

SECRECY in COURT proceedings isn't just in the history books.

James Michener, in "Iberia" (1968), tells the story of an American working in a bar who got drunk and slugged a member of the Civil Guard. That's like tangling with the FBI, the Secret Service and a university registration system, all rolled into one.

"He was hauled off to a military jail, where he was held incommunicado for six weeks. . . Finally he was brought to secret trial and sentenced to seven years in military prison."

The evil of secrecy in court proceedings cuts two ways. Not only can a court abuse the accused in a secret proceeding, but it can abuse society by being too lenient. You'll never know unless you can watch.

IT'S HARD to convince a person facing criminal charges that his interest is best served by all court proceedings being public, as this newspaper, WXYZ and the Detroit Free Press have maintained. But such is the lesson of history.

The accused's friends can't know where he is, whether he needs a defense fund, whether he's being maltreated unless the proceedings are public. Moreover, a lack of news about the accused inevitably feeds the rumor mill. Gossip can damn a man far worse than printed or broadcast facts about the charges he faces.

Finally, our staff agrees that it's an extremely unpleasant duty to report about the morals charges against a priest. It's unpleasant, but it has to be done. The interests of society and of the accused demand it.

A Division
of
Suburban Communications
Corporation

Farmington Observer

Steve Barnaby
Editor
22170 West Nine Mile,
Southfield, MI 48075
(313) 352-5400

John Reddy, General Mgr.
Arthur Longer, Advertising Director Fred J. Wright, Circulation Mgr.

Philip H. Power
Chairman of the Board
Richard D. Agnolin
President
Chief Executive Officer