

editorial opinion

Non-viable is nonsense

Our local governments, efficient agencies that they are, only perform actions which are "feasible."

I know that because the school board and city commission always talk about feasible projects and viable alternatives. When citizens ask if something can be done, the answer invariably will be "Well, that's feasible" or "Yes, that's certainly a viable option."

And so we can take comfort in the fact that our government leaders aren't contemplating unfeasible or nonviable projects, which would be a waste of time, money and effort.

While ago I was tempted to suggest to a government leader that it was redundant to speak of a "viable alternative" or "feasible option" because a decision-maker cannot be faced with an option unless it is feasible. All alternatives should be viable and all options should be feasible.

But I've heard a lot of discussions about alternatives which aren't feasible so maybe such language isn't redundant after all.

THE LANGUAGE is, however, obscure.

What is really meant is that the idea can work. But politicians never say something can work; they say it is viable or feasible.

To the casual observer the words "viable" and "feasible" seem to be used interchangeably. But in some governmental circles, a fine distinction is made.

If a suggestion is made which can work and which the governmental unit can afford, the idea is described as viable. If the suggestion can work, but costs too much, it becomes "feasible."

Suggestions which can't work and are too costly are described as "being within the realm of possibility." To be "within the realm of possibility" places the idea on the border, precariously close to being impossible.

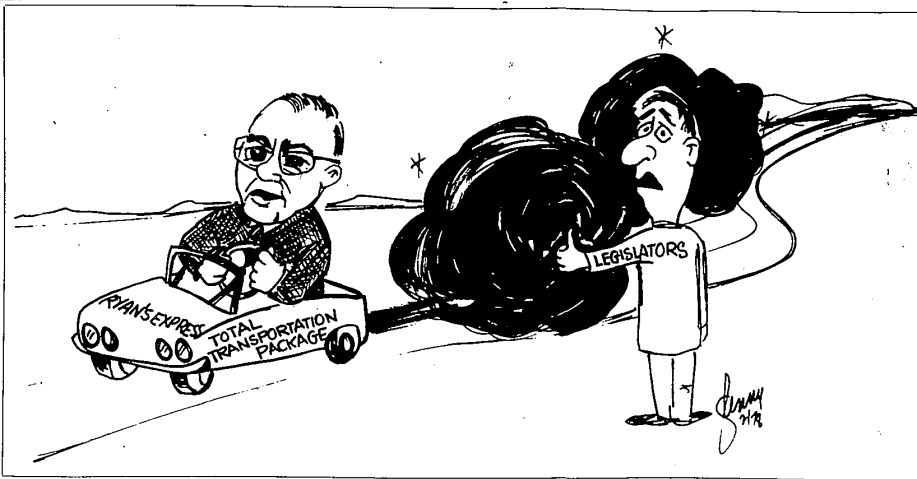
Politicians don't like to tell citizens their suggestions are worthless, totally without merit, and so impractical as to be unworthy of consideration. And so citizens with bum ideas are told the suggestion is "within the realm of possibility."

FOR THE LAYMAN, an alternative or option is merely a choice. Viable or feasible simply means that choice can work.

And so we become overly impressed when told our alternative is feasible, instead of being told our choice can work.

For the purist interested in the true meaning of words, feasible means: "capable of being accomplished or brought about; practicable; possible." Viable means: "capable of living, as a newborn infant or fetus reaching a state of development that will permit it to survive and develop under normal conditions."

—EMORY DANIELS



How to deal with a one-man legislature

Take a look at your youngster's civics textbook. Read the chapter on how state legislatures operate. If it says that legislators introduce bills, that the bills are referred to committees, that committees discuss them and either report them out or defeat them, and that each house debates the bills as they're reported out—tell the kid it ain't so.

For evidence, look at the machinations of the Hon. William Ryan (D-Detroit) in the Michigan House of Representatives, especially on the "total transportation package," as he calls it.

It's rare when you can get legislators of both parties and leaders of both the Oakland County Road Commission and the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority to agree on something. But they agree on this: Ryan's "negotiations" are subverting the legislative process.

The upshot is that the person you send to Lansing from your house district has little chance to assist in the formulation of this maze of 10 bills and a constitutional amendment called the "total transportation package."

I spent an entire morning last week listening to the above-mentioned worthies talk about the package and, in passing, about Ryan's methods. Here's how he works:

SOME MONTHS ago, without introducing any bills, Ryan was named to head up a group to put together a package that would increase state, county and local road funds; take care of SEMTA's public



Tim Richard

transportation needs; and provide for other such transportation needs as ports, rails, bridges, bike paths and so on.

Wary of it, the other legislators dropped out. Ryan, a tireless negotiator, worked on alone, informally.

Two essential interests were in conflict—the road people and the public transportation people. Ryan got them into a meeting. Both John Grubba of the road commission and Larry Salci of SEMTA described it in the same words—"throat-cutting" and "blood-letting."

Out of this came what Ryan calls agreement. For this he won lavish praise from the Detroit Free Press. Grubba said the Free Press story (and, by extension, its editorial) are plain false. Salci, too, oversimplifies; he said he agreed to about five things. Grubba agreed to five, and Ryan put it together in a package of 10 and said he got an agreement.

THIS "PACKAGE" is a virtual maze. Some of the

bills will go to Ryan's own urban affairs committee. Others will go to roads and bridges. Others go to the taxation committee—they're talking about raising gasoline taxes (two cents), motor vehicle registrations (one-third) and an earmarking of sales taxes on automotive items. And so on.

Rep. Sandy Brotherton (R-Farmington) is a member of Ryan's urban affairs committee. Brotherton said Ryan has convened it only once—briefly, on a minor matter—in the last four or five months.

Here is the disturbing part: The timetable for committee work on this matter is one to two weeks.

In other words, Ryan negotiates with the interest groups for months on end, and then the other 109 souls who represent you and me in Lansing have a half-dozen working days (little gets done in the Capitol Mondays and Fridays) to digest and approve a \$168 million transportation program.

The exact words several persons in that meeting used were "subvert" and "a subversion of the legislative process." Those are pretty nasty words to use on Bill Ryan.

But Ryan seems to have it coming. I myself have seen him on the house floor not paying a bit of attention to what thoughtful opponents were saying about a program they would have liked to vote for but couldn't because of many details. Afterwards, the man who didn't listen said his opponents were "anti-city."

A jungle tale: Race for elephant's seat

Once upon a time in the deep, dark jungle, there was scheduled an Assembly Race. It was open to all animals, and the winner would be given a seat in the high Jungle Assembly.

BeeGee the elephant, who held the seat, had announced that he would not participate and would end his running career. He had been a very important assemblyman while his friend, Jerry the Elephant, had been king of the jungle, but lately he had lost some of his power and decided he'd had enough of running.

His announcement was met with mixed emotions. BeeGee had been an effective representative for the animals in his part of the jungle, and many animals were saddened that he was ending his career.

BUT SOME OTHER animals looked upon his decision as an opportunity for them to get the coveted Assembly seat.

The assistant prince of the region, JimDee the Elephant, rushed right in. Other elephants who signed up for the race were LawandOrder, the district attorney; Rupee, a lower assemblyman; Roachie, a college president; and BillMill, an accountant from the western region.

The elephants weren't the only seekers of glory. Almost daily, donkeys brayed to the world that they wanted to participate in the race.

These included Philow of the suburbs, several western donkeys who had served in various parliamentary bodies—such as DonVee and JayOh and Rosie. Then it was rumored that Carlee of the concrete portion of the jungle would be at the starting gate when the gun was sounded.

THE RACE WAS a long way off, but everyone was practicing. Each participant was trying to line up a cheering section and supplies for the long run. The jungle post office was overwhelmed.

Each entrant was confident he would win the race.

With all this activity going on, the prince of the region, BillMill the Elephant, started to get concerned. If BeeGee didn't run, there was a good chance that a donkey, not an elephant, would replace him in the high Jungle Assembly, and the Assembly in the first place weren't enough elephants in the Assembly in the first place.

The elephants who counseled Prince BillMill encouraged him to enter the race himself because by far the fastest and most popular creature around.

But BillMill liked being prince, so he persuaded BeeGee that everyone still loved and respected



him, and that he should enter the race. Upon BeeGee's announcement that he would be in the race, most of the other elephants found various

excuses why they would be busy that day and wouldn't be able to make the race. Only LawandOrder grumbled that there was some sort of conspiracy going on.

Most of the donkeys stayed in the race, but it was obvious that it would not be the cake-walk they had anticipated.

Moral: Don't savor the coconuts until they drop, because when a political animal says yes or no, he really means "maybe."

The law's delay

There's a strange thing about freedom of information cases: The press wins the battles but loses the wars. The reason is dawdling by the courts. It happened twice last week.

A Farmington priest pleaded guilty in Oakland Circuit Court to a charge of gross indecency between males. That pretty much ends his case except for sentencing.

But when the case of the Rev. Gary Berthiaume was before Farmington District Court, Judge Michael Hand slapped a gag order over the arraignment and preliminary exam. Judge Hand not only enforced a state law on gag orders that is probably unconstitutional, but he did it with excessive force, halting the flow of information that was legally permissible for release.

The Detroit Free Press challenged that order in Oakland Circuit Court. So far, the challenge has not been heard. The newspaper will almost certainly win the case, but it will be hollow, academic victory because the Berthiaume case is over.

In Detroit, Recorder's Judge George W. Crockett Jr. closed the doors on a criminal trial involving a teacher. He cited no law, constitutional or otherwise, for his action.

Again, the Free Press appealed, this time to the Michigan Court of Appeals. The newspaper's attorney asked that the trial be halted until the secrecy issue could be decided. Before he got an answer, Crockett proceeded with the trial, and the jury found the teacher innocent.

Thus, there's currently no way the conduct of public courts can be opened to the public. Judges stick together and delay, delay, delay. The public's right to know is sacrificed. Sneak-and-hide government is the de facto winner.

The Stroller

Musings in barber's chair

Over the years, much has been written on how machines have replaced human power in the industrial world; how computers have made life easier for accountants and changed the entire concept of office and newspaper work.

But in recording this revolution in our way of life, The Stroller has yet to see any volumes on the great changes that have taken place in the nation's barber shops. These changes have brought about the passing of what once was the focal point in the small towns of America.

What's more, they were the beehives of activity where young men were given their first steps toward manhood by having their own shaving mugs on the shelves.

The Stroller got to thinking about the old time shops the other afternoon while waiting his regular turn for the monthly "trimming" in Bill's Shop, where Bill, Chris and Bob have taken turns in seeing to it that his bald spot isn't hidden with what used to be fiery red hair.

AS HE SAT looking at the walls, there were no shelves that held the private shaving mugs of the townspeople. There was no shoeshine boy, and in the old days, the shoeshiner was as much a part of the shop as fellows who trimmed your hair or shaved the whiskers from your face. In fact, it often was the shoeshiner who attracted the customers.

The Stroller well remembers the day he had his own shaving mug placed on the shelf. It was one of the three days every young chap looked forward to with great delight. The first was when you graduated from knee breeches to long trousers, the second was when your shaving mug was placed on the shelf to give you identity as a customer, and the third was the day you cast your first vote.

Well, the day The Stroller's mug went on the shelf was quite a day.

His mother had saved his father's mug after he passed away and had it done over so that there was an extra letter to the original WE. Now it had WVE in old English letters.

It was quite a mug. And while she reveled in the thought of having her son follow in his dad's

footsteps, she was choking back tears when she handed the mug to the town barber and said, "There goes my little boy. He is a man now."

IN THE OLD small town barber shops, gossip ran rampant, and all the news was spread about while the customers awaited their turns for a haircut, a trim or a "sing" to go along with the shave.

There was much more to a shave, too, in those days.

The barber used his sharpest razor, and to make certain it would do the job, he used to sharpen it on a leather strap right before your eyes.

THEN, ALONG about a half-century ago, a fellow named Gillette put a safety razor on the market. It assured you of a close shave with no danger of slashing your face. You still used shaving lather, but the Gillette did the trick.

This started the revolution of the barber shops. Men and teenagers were shaving at home, and getting a shave in the town shop became passe. Following the safety razor, a few decades ago we got the electric razor that did away with lather and still gave you a close shave.

What a blow that was to the barbers. No more shaves. No more long lines of customers. And with this change, away went the shoeshiner.

But the barber didn't surrender. Instead, one of their number, whose name is lost in the years, produced electric clippers. This did away, for the most part, with the comb and scissors, the usual tools to cut hair.

THEY TOOK another step. They changed the common name of the barber shop to a "salon" or "tonorial parlor." The barber became what he chose to call a "hair stylist."

The Stroller was thinking of these things when he looked at the price scale on the wall. Haircuts that used to be 15 cents in the old days are now \$5. There are no shaving prices. Hair stylists don't do shaving any more. And "singeing" is out of the question.

Changing times. And nothing has changed as much as the old-time barber shop.

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