

editorial opinion

Homeowners get a break and that's welcome news

A law that gives homeowners a break has finally been added to the books. It won't take the bite out of inevitable higher home assessment factors parceled out by Oakland County or the state. It will, however, allow homeowners to improve their homes without keeping a watchful eye out for the local assessor.

Under the new state law, an assessor will not be able to increase the assessment on a home be-



Entire neighborhoods could take on a brighter glow under a new law which allows up to \$3,000 a year in home improvements to be made without fear of higher assessments. (Staff photo)

cause of normal repairs and maintenance and many common improvements.

The new law spells out what improvements cannot be considered by assessors when setting the value of property for tax purposes.

THESE IMPROVEMENTS include outside painting, landscaping, replacing masonry, replacing siding or roofing or adding new sidewalks and drives.

Interior changes and improvements allowable under the law include adding insulation, storm doors and windows, making electrical improvements, installing new plumbing, replacing furnaces and adding new automatic water heaters.

Other permissible improvements take into account interior painting and redecorating kitchen improvements, and new ceilings, walls and floors.

THE LEGISLATION, House Bill 6139, permits property owners to spend as much as \$3,000 a year for four consecutive years on such improvements without bringing on higher assessments.

The law will go a long way toward eliminating homeowners' reluctance to improve their homes. By the same token, it should have a broader effect on neighborhoods and could ultimately upgrade entire communities.

State lawmakers acted with exceptional wisdom in passing the bill and deserve a hearty round of applause. The next logical step would be to give homeowners a tax deduction for home improvements. That, however, may be too much to hope for.

The people say 'execute,' but penal system can't

Society is of two minds about the death penalty. On one hand, Americans in general—including folks in our suburbs—are strongly in favor of executing certain kinds of criminals.

On the other, our officials can't bring themselves to perform an execution, and so we have years of appeals, delays and paralysis in our law enforcement and penal system.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC is surprisingly strong in its support of the death penalty. The Gallup Poll indicates Americans are 24 in favor.

State Rep. Robert Geake, whose district includes Northville and Livonia, ran a survey last year which showed 82.6 per cent in favor, 12 per cent opposed and 2.4 per cent with no opinion. The recent presidential election had more "undecideds" than that.

Talk about the death penalty in Michigan grew loud after the 1967 Detroit riot and hasn't died down. George Kuhn, then the state senator from western Wayne and Oakland counties, talked about it for those who killed police and firemen.

State Reps. Richard Fessler of Union Lake, Kirby Holmes of Utica and John Bennett of Redford—a bipartisan but conservative group—are cosponsoring a constitutional amendment to allow the death penalty for first-degree murderers. The people would have to vote. Michigan hasn't had the death penalty for more than a century.

Popular feeling, which isn't always articulate, seems to feel that rehabilitation isn't working. Oakland Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, with amazing ability to detect what's bothering the great unwashed public at gut level, likens our penal system to a revolving door and says we're getting raped, robbed and assaulted by the same class of criminals over and over.

Maybe the public is saying it doesn't trust the courts and penal system and simply wants to obliterate the real bad guys from the face of the earth.

THE COURTS and the governors can't bring themselves to enforce the death penalty, however. There are something like 300 persons on death row across the country with no executions in a



Tim Richard

dozen years.

The Gary Gilmore case is a classic. Here is an utterly evil man who executes clerks in the penny-ante robberies of a motel and a gas station. He's not a crazy, like Squeaky Fromme, or a wealthy Mafia type. He's just a crud.

But Gilmore admits it and is willing to take his punishment "like a man." He'll never have his freedom, and he can't see his woman, so he's willing to face the firing squad and get it over with.

But the governor of Utah is delaying the execution. Gilmore tries to execute himself, but the state won't let him. The theory seems to be that it's society's right to polish off Gilmore, and we're not going to let him take away our fun by committing suicide, and besides, suicide is illegal and immoral.

Not even Gary Gilmore deserves that kind of cruelty. So now Gilmore is trying to starve himself to death.

HOW WOULD YOU vote if the death penalty were on the Michigan ballot in 1978?

How would you vote if you had to pull the switch on the electric chair or serve on the firing squad or drop the pellets in the gas chamber?

What if the prisoner were some poor cuckold who shot his wife's lover or a jerk who got sore at a cop who was hassling him?

I think what the judges, lawyers, governors and prison officials fear is that the wrong person will be executed some day. CBS will make a documentary about it, and they will be the "heavies." It's scary to think you could execute the wrong man and that your name would be forever blackened in pop history.

A realistic lesson for kids

Ted Ewald, the Chevrolet dealer in Grosse Pointe and part owner of the Pistons pro basketball team, provided Detroit youngsters some real life lessons of the sort they'll never get in school. The other day, Ewald kicked in \$50,000 for Detroit schools' winter sports programs—boys basketball and swimming and girls volleyball—after youths twice rejected property tax increases that would have paid for them. Ewald taught the kids that:

•When the voters say no, it doesn't mean that no is the answer. Rich persons can over-ride an electorate that has decided to draw the line on school financing.

•Sports are important. That's where the money goes. Forget this jive about reading books, learning math, studying business and typing and drafting and history and carpentry. No one donates money to keep good teachers or reduce class sizes in those courses. Sports are what gets the money.

•Detroit can spend what it wishes on junkets for school board members, big salaries for administrators and an expensive decentralized school system. There is no need to be thrifty or responsible. Affluent suburbanites will bail out Detroit.

Those are, indeed, real life lessons. Thanks, Mr. Ewald, for teaching us all.

SHOVED OUT OF THE PICTURE



How 'Big Two' dominate a multi-million industry

Should the name of the Big Ten be changed? Should it be the Big Two and the Little Eight?

College football is big business today.

The University of Michigan plays seven home games a year, drawing more than 100,000 spectators to each contest.

If each spectator spends an average of \$7 a seat, the revenue for each game is more than \$700,000. That's more than \$4.9 million each year.

The policy of giving the visiting team half of the gate less expenses means that teams fortunate enough to play an away game in Ann Arbor can take home up to \$350,000. Few would make this playing at home.

UM HAS ROOM on its schedule for two non-conference games. The selection of these opponents is now based on how well the opposing teams will draw.

Notre Dame will visit Ann Arbor five times in the next 10 years because it can pull crowds.

A West Coast team will be included because traveling to the West Coast is a great inducement to young high school football players when they are being recruited. It also gives the school national exposure.

If a Big Ten game is televised nationally, the television fee is \$500,000. Under Big Ten rules, anytime any Big Ten team plays, the revenue must be shared by all teams equally or \$50,000 a school. Television money and gate receipts are the only sharing done by the league.

THE CHAMPION of the Big Ten is invited to the Rose Bowl. Teams that participate in the bowl each bring home \$1.6 million.

If you happen to end up in the Orange Bowl because you're the second best, the pot is between \$300,000 and \$1 million. This is quite an incentive.

On single business tax

Business should speak out

My land! You never heard such bitching and groaning as you did 11 months ago when the Michigan "single business tax" went into effect.

Suburban professional people and small businessmen, whose ox was at the head of the line for going by the new levy, were vocal and insistent at the time that the new tax was unfair, unproductive, anti-growth and just another measure of how the Michigan Legislature (trailing clouds of lobbyists) can manage to muck up even the most sensible idea.

For the purpose behind the single business tax (SBT) made enormous sense. It replaced a crazy-quilt of eight other taxes on various kinds of business activities (including a corporate income tax and a local personal property tax on equipment and inventory) with a single tax on all business activity.

This tax constitutes a single 2.35 per cent levy on the "value added" by business operations, which really means a tax on payroll, profit and interest, minus capital investment in plant and equipment.

Advocates of the new SBT claimed it simplified the previously complex business tax situation; opponents charged the law was so incompetently drafted that nobody—including members of the tax-writing committee—could understand it.

Supporters claimed SBT at last treated all businesses in the state alike, thereby reducing favoritism; opponents charged that, in fact, the new SBT was a gigantic plot to benefit the public utilities and the auto companies at the expense of small businesses and professional men such as lawyers and accountants.

ALL THE HUE and cry got so loud that this April, Gov. William Milliken appointed a blue ribbon (why always blue?) commission to look into all the beefs and report back to him about any appropriate changes. The commission is headed by Lt. Gov. James Damman, a Troy hardware merchant in private life.

Damman's panel set out with high hopes and elaborate methodology to measure the pulse of the complaining business community, sending out 4,000 questionnaires to selected representatives of 20 different kinds of businesses in the state.

What has come back? Very little.

"There has been only a 13 per cent response," reported State Rep. Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham), who adds that she has prodded firms in her 63d House District to get their replies back to Lansing. Mrs. McNamee points out that such a low response is not adequate to provide statistically valid projections of attitudes toward the SBT and its failings.

State Rep. W.V. (Sandy) Brotherton (R-Farm-

Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

to win the championship and go on to the Rose Bowl.

With these proceeds, the University of Michigan distributes more than \$900,000 in athletic scholarship money.

Northwestern, on the other hand, with a small stadium and less than great athletic teams nationally, can afford \$290,000 in athletic scholarships.

The gap between those teams which can afford to recruit the best talents and those which can't can only widen.

MICHIGAN'S FINANCIAL fortunes weren't always so great. A few short years ago, Michigan's teams weren't winning as consistently and spectators weren't filling their huge stadiums.

Bowl money wasn't coming their way either.

Credit for the current prosperity is given to Luan Canham, UM's athletic director who has not only lured top-flight coaches to bring back top-flight athletic teams to the schools, but also has introduced promotion to the thinking of Big Ten athletics which has brought out more spectators.

If the trends continue, Michigan and Ohio State can continue to pack their stadiums and continue to attract the best talent to keep them on top.

As this continues, it will only make the Big Two-Little Eight League more apparent.

Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER

ington), who has been arguing against SBT as presently set up, reports that "I've heard any decisions relating to any change have been put off until spring" because the response to the questionnaire has been so light.

Why so? In large part, apparently because the questionnaire is so complex that most businessmen who received it either couldn't waste through it or sent it off to their friendly and expensive accountant or tax lawyer to look over.

SO WHERE DOES all this leave the many folks who were complaining so very loudly so very few months ago?

Public hearings, that's where.

The Damman Commission will hold hearings in Pontiac on Wednesday, Dec. 15, from 1-5 and 7:30-9:30 p.m. in the Oakland County commissioners' auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, and in Detroit on Thursday, Dec. 16, from 9:30 a.m. to noon and 1:30-5 p.m. in Room 614 of the Veterans Memorial Building on the riverfront.

Personally, I think SBT has serious defects, and so did the prestige-laden Michigan Economic Action Council, which recommended thorough review of the levy in its final report. The real problem is that, in shifting the incidence of tax off profits and onto gross payroll, SBT discriminates against precisely what Michigan needs for its future economic growth: businesses providing jobs and firms in the high growth potential sector of service-related activities.

Gov. Milliken evidently agrees at least in part with this view. In October, he assured this newspaper: "From the mail reaching my office, I am convinced we must reexamine the impact on the tax on small business and try to assure greater equity among all segments of the business community."

So, people, here's your chance. If you were going in January and February at SBT, you've got an ideal opportunity to tell the folks just what's wrong. It costs only a trip to Pontiac or Detroit. If that's too much bother, let's not hear you whining again about how unfair and unresponsive Lansing is to your concerns. You'll have only yourselves to blame.

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STEVE BARNABY, Editor
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