

# editorial opinion

## Crackerbarrel DEBATE



## Ad hoc group is a bad joke

Remember the days when city councils made decisions, worked together and resisted the temptation to be vindictive?

After this week's Farmington Hills council session, it's difficult to recall that at one time this city's legislative body was more or less stable.

The latest travesty was the institution of the ad hoc committee to study ways to finance the south end sewer system and to maintain the housing rehabilitation program.

In case you've been out the last couple of weeks, the council, after a ton of pressure from organized and disorganized residents, decided to opt out of the federally funded community development program which would have financed these projects. Too many strings attached, the opponents said.

IN OUTRIGHT revenge, councilmembers in support of community development program foisted on the public this citizens' committee.

Their attitude seems to be: If you don't want to do it our way, then you figure it out.

The astounding thing is that the federal fund opponents fell for the scam hook, line and sinker. Good old Don Wolf, neophyte political leader and neo-populist, went so far as to volunteer to be the committee's chairman, to no one's surprise.

You'll recall Don stood up a couple of weeks back and nobly proclaimed that if the city pulled out of the community development program, he personally would find ways to finance the much needed programs locally.

On the face of it, a citizens committee is a fine thing. After all, you can't knock the idea of residents participating in this fine republic. But a committee put together in the present atmosphere will prove negative and unproductive.

This attitude of "we'll show them" is totally outside the spirit of participatory government. And although I support the aim of carrying through on these programs, the present course is a travesty.

THIS WEEK'S meeting, filled with charges and countercharges, threats and implications of financial loss, were nothing less than outrageous.

The council needs to clean up its own act before passing responsibility on to persons it represents. The fabric of legislative government is unraveling in Farmington Hills.

Those experienced councilmembers and equally experienced political activists in the gallery must pick the city back together and work out a pattern of harmony.

Decisions made on the basis of personal likes and dislikes must cease. The good of the city is at stake.

## Hello, sunshine

Michigan's Open Meetings Act, which we like to call the "sunshine law," won a significant victory in neighboring Washtenaw County last week. Visiting Judge Gene Schmelz of Walled Lake upheld the constitutionality of the law which requires government agencies to conduct business where the public can watch.

What happened was that Republicans on the Ann Arbor City Council held a secret caucus and revised the budget, then voted their decisions in public. Schmelz not only called the secret meeting improper, but he threw out the GOP budget. It was an expensive lesson for those who prefer government by sneaky.

Schmelz went a step further. When the GOP caucus argued it should have the right of secrecy because the law allows secret partisan caucuses in the Michigan Legislature, the judge ruled those Lansing secret caucuses are illegal, too.

Whether the section of his ruling applying to the legislature sticks remains to be seen. The ruling as it affects local government everywhere in Michigan seems on solid ground.

The sad fact is that Republicans in Ann Arbor—along with Democrats and nonpartisan folks elsewhere—think they must go into hiding to make governmental decisions. Unless one is a rock, secrecy simply isn't necessary. Officials need to make up their minds that they can work in the sunshine. It won't kill anyone.

The public's right to know isn't confined to learning what government bodies did the next day. The public has a right to know what government is planning to do before it acts; it has a right to know who is influencing government; it has a right to know what options government is considering; and it has a right to make its own influence felt. That means open meetings. And the law is definitely constitutional.



## 'The Orator' reveals all: Annex OSU, strike Woody through bifocals

Somewhere, I once read that squirrels love the sound of a typewriter. They do.

On a nice Sunday I am in the habit of plugging my Underwood into an electrical outlet out back where the breeze plays a lullaby through the leaves.

There I find a degree of serenity among nearly 30 birch, beech, maple, oak, elm and undefined nut-bearing trees unmatched since I lived for a short time at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

All there was between that weatherbeaten old beachhouse and the water was sand. It was built on stilts and at high tide one could dive from the front stoop into the surf.

Back to the squirrels. Not only do they abound in the present setting, they're forever foraging across the several wooded backyards of our neighborhood, outrunning to the closest tree any pet dog which dares to stalk them.

They share many characteristics. Among them is that when the typewriter starts its sporadic clacking, reflecting the deep thought that goes into an O&B budget report or an outline of a special editorial project—let alone this weekly attempt to be an honest-to-goodness writer—the squirrels creep closer and closer and closer.

After a period of universal silence, the suburban afternoon is quiet suddenly is rent with chatter. You're aware, of course, of the theory that humans can talk to dolphins, or vice-versa. An understanding between man and his uncle, the ape, is taken for granted. By golly, I think we're now at the point of a breakthrough with squirrels.

IT'S NOT DIFFICULT to let the mind wonder who these squirrels might be in real life. There are apt to be six or eight at a time, even a dozen if a roll call vote has been called for.

When several lions congregate, we call it a "pride" of lions. Fish have their "school" and larks their "exaltation." I'm convinced squirrels are so close to human they have discovered the committee.

At Camp David last week, President Carter was locked in talks of utmost world importance with the heads of government from Egypt and Israel. While all the shining lights of the Washington press corps were engrossed in the progress of those negotiations, the U.S. Postal Service snuck in an announcement that we are going to nine-digit zip code numbers.

It was evident that Postmaster General William F. Bolger remembered Lincoln's famous remark, "You can fool all of the people some of the time—pick your spots."

If I could yet understand squirrel talk, I could have had a news scoop of top postal rate dimensions. Instead of reading the nine-digit announcement far back in the daily gazettes of Thursday, Sept. 14, I could have given a verbatim report in our own papers an edition earlier of how the decision was reached.

I wouldn't have had to do anything more than flip on my tape recorder, for I'm convinced it was all worked out by that committee in my backyard.

THERE'S ONE SQUIRREL who obviously is boss. He sits on a bough of an oak over the patio and takes charge. Believe me, he really motivates. I've heard worse sales managers.

There are moments when I swear those furry little fellows in his audience are going to cry, sob, weep and shed tears by turn. Then, when of a sudden, Dick with hair turns his spellbinding verbiage around, they erupt in a cheer louder than you would hear in Michigan Stadium if Rick Leach had



just scored a last-second touchdown to beat Ohio State.

I have dubbed this long-tailed gymnast who goes from branch to branch with the alacrity of a Walenda, and who has the political clout of a Roosevelt, "The Orator."

But I'll be doggone if I know whether he represents management or is the president of his Squirrel Local.

ON THE SUNDAY this is being written, threatening rain clouds playing hop-kotch with the sun overhead, it comes to mind there are several politicians among my neighbors. The fact that they handle their constituents with such ease convinces me they already have mastered squirrel talk, even though I haven't.

At one moment, I distinctly heard "The Orator" say such words as "tenure" and "increment" and concluded a teachers' union meeting was in progress.

But then, what sounded like "we'll fight annexation" drifted to ear. Could it possibly be that the Michigan Township Association had chosen this as a convention site?

But hark! Through the window floated four words from a broadcast on the wireless, "Ohio State" and "Woody Hayes." As one, there was snarling and gnashing of teeth. Next, Notre Dame was mentioned and the squirrels started chasing the dogs.

While they did, I gathered a few of the nuts they hadn't yet buried. They all carried the same beautiful command which told me these guys aren't all bad. Every one was inscribed with a block "M" plus the words, "GO BLUE!"

## We hurt friends

## Kissinger views trends

While the summit meeting was being held at Camp David last week, Henry Kissinger came to Oakland County to encourage the reelection of Bill Broomfield, congressman from 19th District.

Broomfield is the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and worked with Kissinger when he was secretary of state.

At a fund-raising luncheon at the old Raleigh House, Kissinger tried to be light, joking about his alleged large ego. He started off thanking Broomfield for holding his introduction to 10 minutes because he has a problem looking humble for an extended period of time.

His main thrust was his observation about the direction the country was heading.

KISSINGER was careful in his comments about the present administration. All he said about the Camp David meeting was that it was in our nation's best interest that it succeed.

He also cautioned his audience that signed agreements are not peace. He said "the world doesn't stop when agreement is reached." He reminded the audience there are many other nations involved in the midst of peace.

He said America must be strong or the free-thinking people of the world will lose faith in the future.

He said he is concerned by the trend that plans for all new weapons are being scrapped, deferred or subjected to negotiation over an extended period of time.

Kissinger was critical of the Carter Administration's human rights program. Through detente,



Tim Richard

## Headlee can harm transit

In southeast Michigan, public transportation is something of an "infant industry." Only a tiny percentage of all person-trips we make are by public transportation.

That percentage should increase. One reason is that many folks lack mobility for jobs, shopping, personal business. Another is that public transportation is a wise environmental tactic: A bus can move more riders per gallon of fuel than any auto. Still another reason is that our increasing traffic congestion can be alleviated by buses and trains.

Yet the fact of life is that, except for the Woodward corridor, public transportation can't take in enough at the farebox to break even. There must be some tax support. Public transportation must be considered a public service, just like police protection and schools.

SO MY QUESTION, directed to Larry Salci, general manager of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority, was: What happens to transit funding if Michigan votes in tax limitation?

Salci's answer was disheartening. While he personally finds the prospect of a cap on his own taxes charming, he says SEMTA will need new money after 1980. This is assuming the so-called "transportation package" passes the upper house of the Michigan Legislature this week.

"They tell me, 'Shut up, Salci, people don't want to hear about more taxes.' But as a professional, I have to tell people it will take more," he said.

"The effect of Headlee," he said, referring to the tax limitation amendment on the Nov. 7 ballot, "will be to shift tax effort from the state to the locality, as far as SEMTA is concerned. If SEMTA wants additional program, it means taxation. A vote of the people will be needed in 1980."

That prospect may be a dim one. Schools, which touch the lives of more than half our population, have enough difficulty raising new money. Public transportation, touching maybe 5-10 per cent, is likely to have as much luck at the ballot box as a cotton subsidy.

THE NUMBERS look like this:

For fiscal 1979, the combined budgets of SEMTA and Detroit's Department of Transportation (D-DOT) show operating costs of \$104 million.

Less than \$40 million of revenue comes from the farebox. Nearly \$30 million comes from the federal government. That leaves \$34 million to be raised from state and local sources.

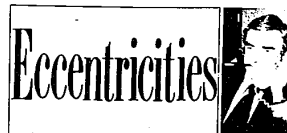
The big item in that \$34 million is some \$16.5 million which comes from the current state transportation fund. That fund is filled by state gasoline, diesel fuel and weight taxes. In an era of more fuel-efficient and lighter cars, such a fund will tend to be more static as a revenue producer than taxes tied to (say) income, retail sales or property values.

Salci's five-year projection of SEMTA and D-DOT operations shows that by the end of 1980 the combined systems will have used up any new revenue from the tax package now being debated in Lansing.

On top of that, one provision of the transportation package is that the percentage of the fund which may go to public transit is to be frozen at no more than 10 per cent. At least 90 per cent of the fund must go to roads, according to a constitutional amendment on the Nov. 7 ballot. Thus, the legislature's hands are tied if it wants to dip into the fund to help public transit.

Clearly, public transportation will suffer, particularly after 1980, if the Headlee amendment or one of the other tax-cutting schemes is adopted. To those who think the automobile is the only patriotic means of transportation, that will be good news.

There is far more to this Headlee tax limitation business than meets the eye.



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

the Nixon and Ford administrations were able to increase the number of immigrants from the Soviet Union from 400 a year to 38,000 under the Helsinki agreement.

HE FEELS TODAY'S frontal confrontations have not helped the people in the Soviet Union.

He said the main thrust of the human rights program is against friendly allied countries, particularly weak ones, and we are undermining their political stability, particularly in South America.

What we really are doing is encouraging people who are not friends of the U.S.

He said the future of the world is up to us, but it is not what exists but what the people perceive to exist. In other words, if we think the problems of the world are insoluble, they will be insoluble.

The high point of both the Nixon and Ford administrations were foreign relations. There were largely left to Kissinger.

It doesn't seem a coincidence that our foreign affairs have deteriorated since Kissinger has departed.

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