

## editorial opinion

# Take time to prevent a tragedy

Avoid a close encounter with fire.

Fire Prevention Week is Oct. 8-14 here in Farmington and Farmington Hills. It is time we all focused on fire safety problems—as well as potential problems—before those problems cause harm to us and our property.

Fire officials recommend that you keep your home free of clutter and unused items that could add fuel to flames and feed a small fire until it grows out of control.

Proper use and maintenance of electrical appliances and equipment also are important. If you must store gasoline and other flammable liquids on your property, use only approved safety containers and don't keep the containers in the house.

TAKE SERIOUSLY the familiar advice, "Never smoke in bed." Far too many deaths are caused each year by persons who fail to heed such warnings.

More than half of the nearly 4,000 fatal dwelling fires analyzed had smoking-related causes, according to recent studies by the National Fire Protection Association, sponsor of Fire Prevention Week.

Such fires are started by cigarettes, cigars and pipes and by open flames, including matches and lighters used by smokers. Still other fires are caused by children playing with smoking materials.

First item to catch fire, the survey found, was furniture at 29 per cent of the time. Bedding was second at 18 per cent and combustible liquid or gas was the third at 14 per cent.

The living room was the place where 39 per cent of these tragic fires started. Another 28 per cent broke out in the bedroom, and 14 per cent started in the kitchen.

IF YOU WANT more information about fire safety in the home, drop in at the Farmington Hills city hall parking lot on Oct. 8 between 2-5 p.m. where the fire department will have a display.

Also during the week, Station No. 1 and Station No. 2 will conduct open houses Oct. 10-13, from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Fire prevention week, incidentally, also marks the anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. During that fire, 250 persons were killed and 17,430 buildings were destroyed at a cost of \$168 million.

That fire helped convince the nation that standards and legislation were needed to protect lives and property. Thanks in part to that enhanced interest, fewer lives today are lost due to fire.

But more still can be done. And much today centers on us as homeowners. It is persons like us who must take the first step toward preventing fires. The efforts are minimal, but the dividends can be substantial in terms of lives saved.

## New role for Brooks

Prosecutors are supposed to prosecute crooks. But a new role was added 2 years ago when Michigan set up 2 Crime Victims Compensation Board, and Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson seems loath to accept it.

Thomas Woods, chairman of the three-person board, says prosecutors should be distributing forms to local police departments and helping individual victims fill them out. The compensation board doesn't want to get into the act because it doesn't want to create a big, new bureaucracy.

Woods says prosecutors in 82 of Michigan's 83 counties are on the ball, some even assigning staff members to this function. The holdout is Patterson. The Oakland prosecutor contends it's not his office's job to promote the program.

Patterson needs to think it over. We remind him of the day in 1972 when he announced his candidacy, saying: "I hope I'll have the chance again to fight for the victim—late in Oakland County, the defendant has certainly had the edge."

So far, the Crime Victims Compensation Board has paid out \$500,000. Based on population, Oakland County, which one-ninth of Michiganians call home, should have received about \$55,000. Instead, Oakland residents have received only \$6,000.

The State of Michigan has done some bold thinking in seeking to compensate victims as well as to send crooks to jail. It's not like Brooks Patterson to ignore the victims of crime. We hope he will soon get in step with the other 82 county prosecutors—and perhaps be a leader.

# Transpo package tries to help all

Last week the Michigan Legislature passed, and the governor signed, a series of bills known as the Transportation Package.

This package was one of the most confusing pieces of legislation of the year. It was a comprehensive package covering all modes of transportation that didn't satisfy any special interest group, so everyone took a pot shot at it.

The vote was so close that it took the lieutenant governor to cast the tie-breaking vote in the senate. This does not necessarily reflect on its merit, this being an election year. The bills included increased taxes on fuel and auto registration fees, and a lot of legislators didn't want to be recorded as voting for increased taxes.

IT HAS BEEN called the transit package, the pothole package, and Coleman Young's subway package. It is a little bit of everything except the subway package.

The series of bills is supposed to raise \$168.5 million in new revenue for transportation. The allocation is:

- County roads, \$49.3 million.
- City and village streets, \$27.3 million.
- State highway programs, \$30.4 million.
- Statewide comprehensive transportation programs.

## Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.



gram, \$57.5 million.

• Critical bridge program, \$4 million. Each county, city and village will receive for roads approximately 25 per cent more revenue than it received in 1977.

The critical bridge program would be enhanced 400 per cent to help reduce the numbers of structures in dangerous condition.

Some 12.6 per cent more money for state highway programs will allow more for maintenance, reconstruction and new construction.

THE STATEWIDE comprehensive transportation program will allow continuation of the expansion of public transportation programs such as rail freight, rail passenger, inter-city bus, water trans-

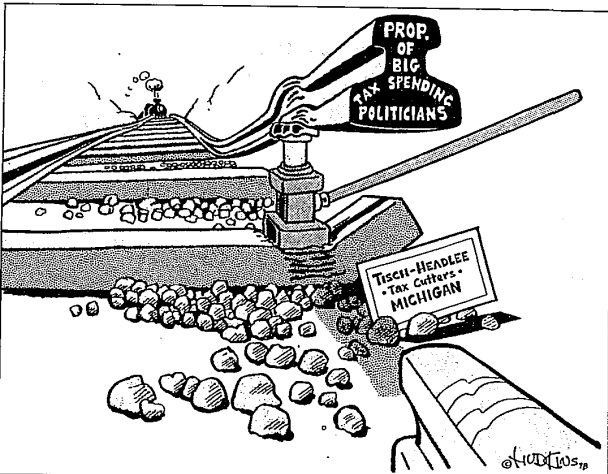
portation and regional transportation systems such as SEMTA in the metropolitan Detroit area.

SEMTA should get around \$21 million, which it will use as local share match for federal funding in upgrading its regional transportation system. The future regional system should include commuter rail, line haul buses, small buses such as Dial-A-Ride, a people mover in downtown Detroit and probably some sort of light rail (trolley) system along Woodward Avenue. There do not seem to be enough votes on the SEMTA board for Mayor Young's subway idea.

The package was hard to pass because road builders wanted more money for state highways, county road commissions wanted a larger share as did railroads and regional transportation systems.

As our expressways get older and our winters wreck our local roads and the federal government abandons more rail lines and cities develop more need for public transportation—someone has to pick up the freight. Financing through fuel and vehicle registration fees seems like a fair way to do it.

(The writer is also a board member of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.)



## A weighty proposal

# Toll roads for taxes

George Worrall, whose name is pronounced most accurately while gargling, was late for our committee meeting but came in singing despite his tardiness. Chairman Bob Sego sidestepped any reprimand when he recognized the tune as being one of the hits from the new Headlee-Tisch-Jarvis musical, "Deep in the Heart of Taxes."

This is a self-appointed grass roots group made up of citizens of varied professional interests. There are no dues, there is no charter, and the chairmanship goes to whoever gets to the meeting hall first.

Worrall, a quick-witted steel salesman, immediately changed the course of discussion. Sego, claiming the home court advantage, had opened the agenda with a lecture on how the corrugated paper industry in which he slaves untiringly is facing up to metric conversion.

Our one rule is that the interrupter gets the floor. Thus, Worrall got his way in steering talk to the recently passed increases in Michigan's gasoline tax and license plate fees.

This was much to the despair of Abdul Jarrar, who peddles spray paint equipment and on the side is a walking baseball encyclopedia. Ab was prepared to orate on chances of all world series contenders, and if you had a hunch to bet it would have been worth hearing.

THE MOOD OF THE congregation, as others wandered in and out of the conversation, was one of reluctant acceptance for all of "Transpack," the program that brought the tax increase of gasoline and diesel fuel as well as the 30 per cent boost in license plate costs.

The purpose—that of providing \$168.5 million in new funds for roads, bridges and public transportation—softened antagonism. It did not silence it entirely.

Lack of confidence in our leaders' ability to arrive at universally acceptable decisions on the type of facilities and routes for new means of mass

## through bifocals



transit in the metropolitan area is one hole in the dike.

Another is that people are tired of all the talk, which has been going "round and 'round so fast that the whole realm of taxation has become what another committeeman, Ed LaCroix, our semi-conductor expert, called "the hula hoop of 1978 politics."

I didn't let on that as a reader of many newspapers I knew he got the line from a UPI story by Arnold Sawislaw.

Also contributing to the negativism is the suspicion that once having been passed, the new bites at the taxpayers' pocketbooks never will be rescinded. Twice ever thus, said John Conn from under his halo.

JOHN ONCE PASSED for two touchdowns and ran for another in a Dartmouth victory over Holy Cross in 1939, and from that has built a career as a packaging specialist. His newest political package is this, although I like to think he made it with tongue in cheek and maybe with his neighbor, Archibald E. Vallier, as advisor:

"Toll gates, that should be our solution to public funding, and the U.S. Mint has given the answer with its funny new \$1 coin."

The slot machine industry is going to have to retrofit anyway to accommodate the slightly-larger-than-a-quarter metal dollar. It will be copper-nickel instead of silver and for the toll gate industry it could be pennies from heaven. That's all the dollar's worth anyway.

"Put 'em at every bridge, at every city, township and county boundary on every road. Toll gates would solve all problems of government finance."

"Not mine," said Sego. "I'm on the road so much that if I carried that many dollar coins in my pockets, my pants would fall down."

This prompted a subcommittee caucus under direction of auto parts supplier George Tabaka. The recommendation of George, Jarrar and Worrall was that if anything like this ever comes about the committee will consider entering the suspender business. It led to a unanimous vote for adjournment.

P.S. On the way out, Abdul said the Dodgers are a series cinch.



Tim Richard

# Mad courts force gov't. role on press

It took a sex issue to get the public aroused to what newscpeople have been saying for a long time: American courts have gone mad.

Athletes shower and change clothes in locker rooms, but a court says the New York Yankees must open their locker room to female reporters.

Even from a radical feminist point of view, the ruling is mad. The standard justification for admitting female sportswriters is that they shouldn't have to work under a closed-door handicap and have deadlines to meet, too. But this ruling came in response to a suit by a Newsweek reporter whose deadline is only once a week.

The Yankees-Newsweek lunacy is only the latest.

OVER IN NEW Jersey, a court has made a great game of locking up a New York Times reporter.

It seems that when the law couldn't find anyone to convict in some mysterious patient deaths, the reporter plowed ahead and came up with a suspect.

So who got thrown in the hoosegow? The police chief who couldn't nail a suspect? The prosecutor who couldn't get a conviction? The suspect? No, the only one in jail is a totally innocent reporter, who refused to turn over his notes.

In Michigan's own north country, the notes of a reporter for the Traverse City Record-Eagle were turned over to a court. The reporter had interviewed a woman in jail awaiting trial in the stabbing death of her husband. The reporter risked a contempt of court citation and jail if the notes were not surrendered.

These cases are a little more serious.

THERE ARE TWO sets of reasons why newscpeople decline to play ball with courts—domestic and international.

The international reasons are clearest. In the major part of the world, notably in communist and "third world" nations, the press is an arm of the government. There is no such thing as independent businesses hustling ads and news and selling them to a fickle public.

And so when an American correspondent abroad starts getting close to embarrassing truths, the foreign government is prone to say, "Aha! An American agent. We shall toss him out of the country."

The American correspondent replies, "No, I work for an independent business." His case is undercut by a handful of reporters who do act as informants for American intelligence and by courts which make a reporter and his notes, in effect, an arm of the government.

THE TRAVERSE City Record-Eagle case is a perfect example of the domestic reasons.

It's rare for a defendant awaiting trial to grant an interview. The defense attorney, wisely, usually says, "Anything you say may be used against you. Say nothing. We'll fight in court."

Yet in a case of high public interest, the defendant may have something to say to the public prior to the trial. Lord knows, the prosecutor and police chief often do.

But now the courts have thrown ice water over an accused's freedom to talk to the outside world by saying it will demand the reporter's notes. Put yourself in the woman defendant's position: Are you going to grant me an interview if you know the prosecutor, through the power of a court, is going to confiscate my notes and use them against you?

That's what it's all about. If newscpeople are going to be free to try to tell the truth, we can't be government agents. All snickering about the Yankees' locker room aside, the courts are going quite, quite mad.

A Division of  
Suburban Communications  
Corporation

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