

editorial opinion

Oil bidding concept needs public support

Finally, cooler heads are emerging in the debate over what to do about the international blackmail waged against this country by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

While Americans collectively chew their fingernails wondering whether they'll have enough gas to get to work next week, at least one U.S. congressman has composed himself enough to come up with a pretty good idea.

In short, U.S. Rep. William Brodhead, D-Detroit, has proposed establishment of a federal purchasing authority. OPEC nations would be forced to bid through the authority to sell oil in this country. The lowest bidder would get the nod.

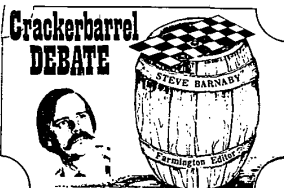
Brodhead believes this would drive down the price of oil. We would be freed from the cartel "rip-off."

Now, regular readers of this column know that the congressman and I don't always agree on what's best for this country. But in this case, the 17th District representative has my support.

Actually, he is going to need a lot of support to get this bill approved. Opposition will be plentiful, vocal and strong, both politically and monetarily. More conservative members of Congress will yell that this is a slap against the free enterprise system. That is just a lot of bunk.

One major reason oil prices are so high is that this country is dealing with a cartel which unilaterally establishes prices. No free enterprise in that.

Secondly, we will hear from the oil companies which are more concerned with their pocketbooks than their political philosophy. American oil producers would like to sell their oil at the same prices



as our Arab friends. So they are the last ones to want oil prices to come down.

They endorse taking off controls so American oil

prices rise to their "natural level." They want \$15 or \$20 a barrel, whatever the going OPEC price is.

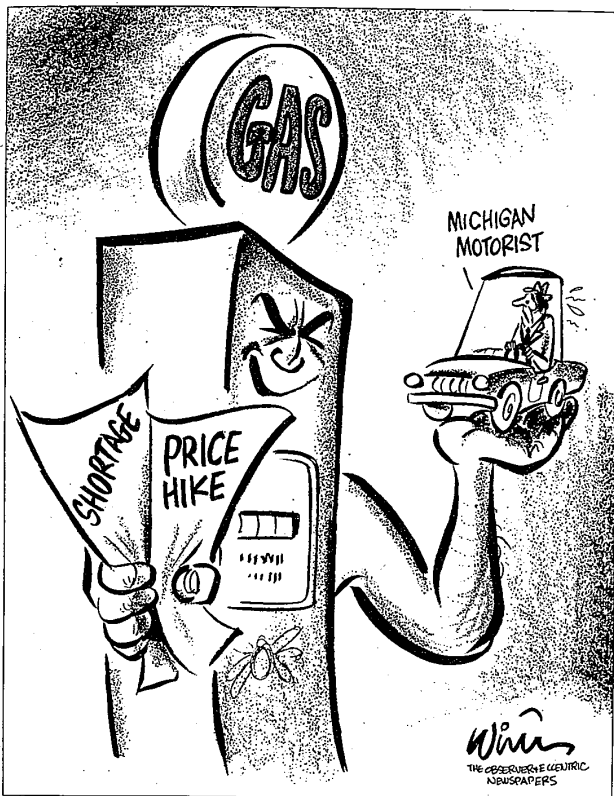
The only thing natural about these kinds of price increases are the oil companies' natural greed.

Still others will whine that this puts the government into the oil business, which really isn't a bad idea anyway. But this bill doesn't do that. So you folks who enjoy holding up the postal system as an example of inept government business practices can slow that argument.

All this bill does is make the government an agent in transferring oil from OPEC to domestic distributors.

This proposal is a sane option, a workable solution which gives this country time to develop its own natural resources without having OPEC put the guns to our heads in the meantime.

"I've got bad news and worse news!"



Road Commission turns transit expert — for cash

"Oakland County has consistently advocated the concept of regional mass transportation."

The wrecking crew is at it again. The Oakland County Road Commission is beating the drums for county withdrawal from the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA). It proposes to set up an Oakland County Transportation Authority (OCTA).

The quotation is from the road commission's report to a county board committee advocating withdrawal from SEMTA. The thrust of the argument is that Oakland residents would get better service at no increase in taxes if Oakland goes it alone.

The road commission's report sounds as if some champion of public transportation were at work, looking out for the poor, the disadvantaged, the energy-conscious. One is tempted to shed a tear of joy at the prospect of so much bus service coming Oakland's way if only the county will form OCTA.

"...The only true 'mass transit' in this county is the automobile."

The source of this second quotation may surprise you.

It came in a letter published in this newspaper last year dated Sept. 18, from James Briney, the bright young assistant managing director of (are you ready?) the Oakland County Road Commission.

If you are a logical person who is unaware of the road commission's politics, you may ask yourself: How can this be? Are not these two statements contradictory? How can the road commission state the county supports mass transportation and yet suffer its No. 2 honcho to say mass transit means the automobile?

WE COULD GO a step further in the analysis, and we shall.

Back in the middle and late 1960s, bus companies were collapsing like bugs hit by Raid. At that time, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority was formed to step into the gap.

SEMTA's first sugar daddy was the Metropolitan Fund, based in (you guessed it) Oakland County. The man who drafted the SEMTA enabling act and served as its first chief administrator was a resident of Southfield, which, the last time I checked, was in Oakland County.

Where was Oakland County's planning and build-



Tim Richard

ing committee, which is now considering quitting SEMTA? Nowhere.

Where was the Oakland County Road Commission in that dire hour of need? Dreaming of more free ways.

AT THE SAME TIME, an outfit called TALUS (Transportation and Land Use Study) was wrapping up its work. TALUS was headed by a fellow from Bloomfield Hills, which, the last time I checked, was also in Oakland County.

TALUS talked about no less than five rapid transit lines. And where, in those important days of planning, was the Oakland County Road Commission?

The road commission saw the light about the same time it saw the money — 1976, when the Ford Administration pledged \$600 million for SEMTA's balanced transit package. Over night, the road commission became experts on rapid transit — far greater experts, to hear them tell it, than people who had been in it for years.

Says the road commission's latest report: "Oakland County could base its planning on receiving at least 15 percent of the \$600 million, and perhaps more."

AND NOW IT'S out in the open. The road commission doesn't want the county simply to withdraw from SEMTA. It wants to pull out and take with it enough of SEMTA's funding to wreck the legitimate transit authority's light rail plan for the Woodward corridor.

What would county government — or the road commission, for one must suspect it of wanting to run OCTA — do with its cut of the \$600 million (assuming it could really get the dough)?

Well, consider the response of county government and the road commission to the dark days of the 1960s, and then consider the words of the road commission's assistant managing director:

"The only true 'mass transit' in this county is the automobile."

Anyone want to buy a slightly used transportation system from the Oakland County Road Commission?

It's no good if we don't understand

Many Michigan residents perceive — incorrectly — that their property taxes are going up each year. They look at the gross bill that comes Dec. 1, or see the statement from the mortgage company that their payments are rising, and figure they're getting socked.

Then they are fair game for a poorly thought-out panacea like the Headlee amendment.

Actually, Michigan has a state income tax provision which has been dubbed the "circuit breaker." When your homestead property tax gets beyond a certain percentage of your income, the state rebates 60 percent of the excess. You get the rebate as part of your income tax refund.

One problem is that most people don't know they're getting it.

While school superintendents talk "circuit breaker" when trying to sell millage increases, there really is no line labelled "circuit breaker" in your state income tax form. You have to hunt to find the property tax rebate. It's there, but it's hard to find.

A second problem is that it takes time to get your rebate. You get your tax bill Dec. 1 and pay it no later than February. But your state income tax refund takes several more weeks or months to arrive. Meanwhile, you have had to cough up hard cash and you're giving the state an interest-free loan.

Property tax increases for local government would be more palatable if people could see and feel the effects of the rebate. The Michigan Legislature needs to address the cash flow and public relations problems so folks will know they're getting a good deal when they send their tax dollars to the school board or city hall instead of to Lansing.

At 5¢ a ticket

A boost for our Olympic athletes

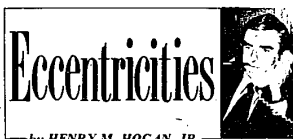
Every four years, the United States Olympic Committee goes out and tries to beg, borrow or steal enough money to field a team in the Olympic Games.

Since the inception of the modern games, the United States has elected to stay away from possible assistance from the federal government because it was afraid of governmental interference.

Other nations have been using government funds not only to compensate their athletes so they have time to practice, but also to build training facilities, because the prestige of winning is important to national pride.

The U.S. has still done well because our athletes are free to do as they wish, and their desire to excel has proved too much for most foreign competitors who are trained, coached and housed by men who take orders from the governments they represent.

However, the U.S. is feeling the squeeze because



by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

it is not providing our athletes the facilities and competition which help make winners.

TOM HARMON, former University of Michigan football great and now a West Coast sports-caster, has come up with a plan that might change all this.

He suggests a five cent tax or assessment be placed on every sports ticket sold in the U.S. from college level through professional ranks.

After being collected by the federal government, this money would be turned over to a foundation controlled by five trustees. The government's involvement would end there.

This method would mean only those Americans interested in sports would pay the freight.

The money would not only support our Olympic teams, but would also be sufficient to finance our international teams in other years, giving our athletes experience in world competition.

In addition, with the funds collected, five athletic centers could be constructed in the five regions of the U.S. containing complete field and track facilities, championship swimming pools and a small stadium for basketball, volleyball and so forth.

These facilities would allow any athlete with ability to work out near his home.

THE PLAN WOULD also provide three Winter Olympics Centers for competition and training. At the present time, we have very limited facilities for certain Olympic events and no real program where all youngsters can have the opportunity to compete.

In ice skating, we have but one rink for speed skating in the entire country. We have no bobsled run and very limited ski jumping sites and facilities.

This plan would allow our country to join other countries who support their athletes. It would be open, honest support based on a small fee paid only by the sports fan.

If we back our young athletes with money and facilities, they'll do the rest. If we can't support the greatest resource this country possesses, our youngsters, we don't deserve to be called the greatest nation in the world.

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