

editorial opinion

Get quarters ready to throw into toll machine

Making up a \$60 million deficit is a pretty neat trick under even the best of circumstances.

For the Michigan Department of Transportation, and the county road commissions, these times could be construed as anything but good.

The department's income derives from funds raised through gasoline taxes and license plate fees based on auto weight. In the good old days, most of us drove heavy cars which guzzled a lot of petrol.

But that golden age must seem like ancient history to the transportation folks. With motorists driving lighter cars which use less fuel, the financial spigot is running dry.

If this trend continues, which undoubtedly it will, all of us are going to be hurting.

There just aren't going to be the bucks to pay for the kind of road maintenance to which we have become accustomed. That means lots more potholes and lots more bucks for you to fork over to get the car fixed.

It also means that new road construction will suffer — not a happy thought when you're contemplating a slick new highway to whisk you to work from suburbia.

About this time, John Woodford, the state's transportation chief, is sitting up in Lansing dreaming up ways to make up the difference.

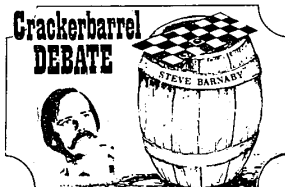
ONE IDEA is to switch from a flat rate per gallon tax to a value tax — percent of sales. Another is

to raise the price you pay for license plates.

But neither idea is very popular among lawmakers, so the Department of Transportation finds itself in a real bind.

Frankly, I'm a great believer in the pay-as-you-go system when it comes to highways, which translates into turnpikes. There's got to be a lot of merit in the idea. It works nicely in other states to raise highway funds. Besides, turnpike travel is pretty convenient.

Even though the tourist industry is down because of the spiraling gas prices, we've still got a lot of folks from out of state who drive around and put wear and tear on our highways for free. They should pay their share.



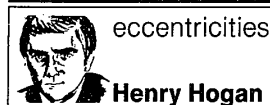
Also, we've got a somewhat inequitable highway taxing plan as it now stands. Some of us make it the length and breadth of the state at least once a year — sometimes even more. Others never get out of the metropolitan area.

SO LET'S collect a tax, through tolls, from those persons who actually use the highways the most. Besides, turnpikes do have their advantages when it comes to travel. Take a look at Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Gas stations, motels and restaurants are built right into the system. The traveler knows where they are and can make planned stops.

Nothing is more annoying in Michigan than getting off an exit marked "gas," having to travel on unit roads to some town and find the gas station closed.

Turnpikes aren't the entire answer. But they certainly would go a long way toward keeping up our much needed roads.



eccentricities

Henry Hogan

Buffets: A tool of the devil based on greed

Whenever it is suggested that we ought to attend a buffet, I'm always one of the first to say, "Let's go!" Based on pure greed, buffets allow customers to eat all they want for a set price.

But the more I attend them, the more I realize the devil must have designed them.

If you have any intention of keeping your waistline trim, buffets are something to avoid. No matter how resolute you are in saying you can limit your intake, the principle is to get as much food into your belly as you can to justify the price.

We all know there is no such thing as a free lunch, so how can eating establishments offer all you can eat for a fixed price?

THE ANSWER is that restaurants have to outwit the customer, luring you to fill up on cheaper dishes so you won't have room for the more expensive fare.

They also set the stage so that you are filled with nervous tension and can't eat as much as you normally do.

Often when you arrive, a table isn't ready, so they send you to the cocktail lounge. Drinking usually increases your appetite, so why do they do this? The answer is that you watch all the people ahead of you grabbing all the goodies, and you sit there worrying about whether there will be anything left.

When they finally seat you, they encourage you to start off with the soup and salad. The shrimp and other expensive goodies are usually at the end of the line.

They give you a very small plate to induce embarrassment if you try to put too much on it. Often it is warm, and they put the Jello up front. When it melts, you're reluctant to mix food with the rest of liquid color.

THERE IS NO way you can have an interesting conversation at a buffet.

You usually go in a group and everyone eats at a different pace, filling their plates to a different degree. The whole meal is a medley of jumping up and down.

Because there are large groups, most restaurants have two food lines to feed people faster. You have to scrutinize the two lines before you pick one to make sure the items are identical.

You also scrutinize the people to make sure there are no slow ones ahead of you. This would delay you and could cut down the number of trips back if the restaurant closes early.

Another way restaurants hold down costs is to have fewer waitresses. If you order wine, you should order dessert wine because that's when it finally arrives.

Now that I have figured out the buffet game, the real question is: Can I resist playing it?

'Sorry, Pal!'



Biting the hand ...

Ballplayers get ready

When he attended public school in the Pennsylvania Dutch country, The Stroller recalls that each day there was an hour devoted to practice penmanship.

We were given what were then called copy books. Each book had a line at the top of the individual page, and we were asked to copy as near as possible the line Spencerian model.

There was one line The Stroller never will forget. It read simply:

"Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

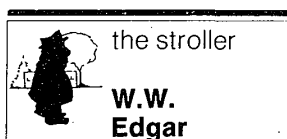
When he picked up the friendly morning paper recently and learned that the major league baseball players were going on strike, he remembered that copy book line.

That the players were going on strike was surprising enough, but it became even more astounding when the article revealed that the average salary in the major leagues is now more than \$133,000 a year.

Imagine that. An average salary of that magnitude not being satisfactory to a player who "works" only six months out of a year and is given two months in Florida each spring to get ready to engage in his craft. Sounds absurd. And it is.

IT IS TRUE that in the early league years, players were what they called "slaves" to the owners.

But that was taken care of with the introduction of the free agent clause — an agreement that per-



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

mits a player with six years of service in the majors to declare himself a free agent and seek bids for his services.

Still that hasn't been enough. Now the players have become so greedy that they expect salaries sufficient to allow them to retire and live off the fat of the land for the rest of their lives. And, remember, a major league career seldom exceeds 15 years.

The strike gets more ridiculous when you consider individual cases such as Nolan Ryan, the pitcher who recently exacted a contract for more than \$1 million dollars a year from the Texas Rangers.

It becomes silly when you figure that, at best, he will pitch only once every fourth day. How would you like a job where you got paid a million dollars a year for working every fourth day and were given two months in Florida in the bargain. That's being greedy in the extreme and again reminded The Stroller of the old copy book: "Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

It is a far cry from the old days when The Stroller was covering the baseball beat for The Detroit Free Press and the late Frank J. Navin owned the Tigers.

Well he remembers that Harry Heilmann, the league batting champion, used to leave his home in California to spend Christmas in Detroit, and on each trip, he'd call on Navin at the Tiger office, asking to see a new contract. Then he'd sign his name and say to Navin, "Put in the figures when you get around to it and send it me."

Now an average salary of \$133,000 is not enough!

The players are not only biting the hand that feeds them, but they are about to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.



Tim Richard

Security: ever more hassle

Tom Lonergan, who covers county government and politics for us, dutifully sat through a speech by Sen. Howard Baker back in the days when Baker was a presidential candidate.

Afterwards, Lonergan moved in closer as the radio guys sought to get a few extra comments on tape.

You must understand Lonergan is a clean-cut, blue-eyed, wholesome looking midwesterner and nothing at all like the caricatures in "Doonesbury." As he moved toward Baker, he absent-mindedly thrust his hand into his pants' pocket. To his amazement, he felt his hand being pulled out of the pocket.

It was a Secret Service man, doing what he believed to be his duty.

A FEW WEEKS later, I was arranging credentials for Lonergan and photographer John Stano to cover Sen. Ted Kennedy.

I keep a file for coverage of presidential candidates with our staff members' proper names, dates of birth and Social Security numbers. I myself have covered Presidents Johnson, Nixon and Ford and vice presidential contenders Lodge and Muskie, and those three pieces of information were all I ever had to give to the Secret Service.

A day later the Kennedy people called back and said Secret Service wanted the news staffers' places of birth.

A few hours later, another call said Secret Service wanted middle names.

A third call asked even more data.

At this point I was tempted to tell the Kennedy people and the Secret Service to forget the whole damned thing — but perhaps readers wouldn't understand.

COVERING FORD at a 1974 banquet was an eye-opening experience.

A friend who is a Republican leader procured a ticket for me to sit with the regular diners, who were quite free to wander within 15 or 20 feet of the chief executive and flash their Instamatics.

Our photographer was confined to a set of press bleachers. I do not misquote the word "confined." Photographers were cordoned off, and the Secret Service watched them like hawks eyeing a field of mice. The photographers had to use telephoto lenses.

Sitting with the diners, I was royalty. Visiting our photographer, I was growled at like a criminal.

IF YOU ENTER the Federal Building in Detroit from the Fort Street side, you encounter a convenient bank of elevators going to the courtroom floors. I used to use them.

Now a very tough looking uniformed guard asks: "Are you a federal employee or an attorney?"

My little game is to answer politely: "I'm an American citizen."

That means nothing to the guard. An American citizen is dirt.

"Sir, unless you are a federal employee or an attorney, you'll have to use the elevators at the other end of the building."

At the other end of the building is a metal detector which rings at my pocket change, my lighter, even my belt buckle. All must be removed before I may pass.

At both ends of the building, I say something to the guards that will make them dislike their jobs, something that will annoy them as much as they annoy me, though not so nasty that it gets me arrested.

Security? Nonsense. It's hassle which protects no one. And those who hassle me will be very respectfully hassled back.

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