

School busing issue still volatile in suburbs

By LEONARD POGER

It was nine years ago this week that one of the most controversial topics in the suburbs — school busing — first erupted.

Like the ash from Mount St. Helens, the fallout was widespread.

It is quiet now, but reflections on the ninth anniversary show that while some things have quieted down, other aspects of the issue may erupt again.

It was just nine years when U.S. District Judge Stephen Roth found the state of Michigan and the Detroit Public Schools guilty of racial discrimination in educational decisions and policies.

Roth said that a remedy for eliminating the past discrimination could include the busing of students between Detroit and 54 suburban districts. He put that position in writing in mid-June, 1972. That ruling was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision in late July, 1974.

The federal court in Detroit then ordered into effect a limited busing plan which involved only Detroit.

The case isn't dead yet although there is no direct impact on the suburbs now.

ROTH DIED several years ago and Judge Robert DeMeo took over the case. Under pressure, he agreed to this year to have another judge handle the case. The case is now in the hands of a three-judge panel.

But the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which initiated the civil suit in 1970, said that its plans include a metropolitan busing plan involving Detroit and its suburbs.

The NAACP is continuing its legal argument that the state of Michigan is ultimately responsible for all public education and can't delegate its authority to local school districts, Jesse Goodwin, education committee chairman for the NAACP, told THE Observer.

He said there is no active motion before the federal court in the Detroit busing case to bring the suburbs into the case, "we hope to get into that very shortly."

THE ISSUE, though quiet now, was the most frequently discussed topic — if not the only topic, heard among suburban residents.

Suburban homes sprouted window signs with the message "This Family Will Not Be Bused."

One state legislative candidate was giving away the signs. His opponent was charging 50 cents each for them.

Homeowners started anti-busing chapters in their backyards or family rooms. There were large groups of parents jamming public meetings to demand that school officials promise to vehemently oppose any busing order from a federal judge.

City Councils got into the act, adopting anti-busing resolutions and some even promising to go to jail if found guilty of failing to obey a court order on busing.

THERE WAS AN immediate political impact caused by the busing feud. Candidates for every office — as remote from busing as the office of Oakland County Drain Commissioner — said they were not only anti-busing but more anti-busing than their opponents.

Challengers with no political background challenged long-time incumbents on the busing issue.

In Oakland County, L. Brooks Patterson gained exposure in the newspapers and on local TV news programs by being Irene McCabe's attorney. Ms. McCabe gained nationwide prominence as leader of a citizens group opposed to busing. Patterson was elected Oakland County Prosecutor on the basis of the publicity.

Conservative candidates running on anti-busing platforms either won election or came close to defeating well-known incumbents.

When two candidates for a post were both vigorously anti-busing, the voters made their decision on "who was the MOST anti-busing."

BUT JUDGE ROTH, who died several years ago, commented in his 1972 ruling about the reality of busing — within a single district.

He cited national and state statistics which show that a large number of pupils already get to school on a bus.

In Michigan, from 35 to 40 percent of all students are bused, he said.

The only change under his metropolitan plan is the "direction of the bus."

"For school authorities or private citizens to now object to such transportation practices raises the inference

not of hostility to pupil transportation but rather racially motivated hostility to the desegregated school at the end of the ride," Roth said.

The judge based his ruling on numerous actions of the Detroit school board, state Legislature, and past policies of the Federal Housing Administration which led to racially segregated housing patterns in Detroit and the suburbs.

The state Constitution gives general control over public education to the state government.

But during the 1971 crisis and in subsequent years, suburban school officials claimed that the local school district boundaries were sacred and couldn't be arbitrarily changed.

problems of money and vacant schools caused by declining student enrollments caused some changes in the suburbs.

One suburban school board attorney warned that vacant public schools, property or equipment shouldn't be sold, rented, or leased to church schools.

The reason for that advice was a New Orleans busing case in which a federal judge ruled that suburban schools may be aiding "the white flight" from the central city if they cooperate in allowing private or parochial schools to be located in their communities.

But some Detroit area suburbs have not followed that advice. Detroit Catholic Central High School

moved in 1979 from the northwest side of Detroit into a Redford Township junior high school.

United Christian Schools bought a vacant school in Garden City.

On a larger scale, there were other actions that show a growing scale of cooperation of public schools without regard to local boundaries.

PLYMOUTH-CANTON schools, faced with a growing pupil enrollment, have agreed to rent a Livonia School District junior high next fall to handle its overflow.

Livonia Board of Education has agreed to handle the administration of the North Dearborn Heights food and busing programs.

In adult education, Livonia will handle the Redford Union programs while Garden City will do the same for the Crestwood and North Dearborn Heights districts.

School officials defend all those actions by saying that they were mutually agreed to under contract.

Dr. Goodwin of the NAACP said his group is aware of the rise of church schools in formerly public schools and it further proves the point that the state government is part of the educational decision making process.

Attorney William Saxton, who represents most the suburban school districts in the Detroit busing case, doesn't feel that parochial schools locating in vacant public schools would have any impact on his clients' legal position.

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NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT I WILL BE AT MY OFFICE
Monday, October 6, 1980 — Last Day
From 8 o'clock a.m. until 8 o'clock p.m.
The 30th day preceding said Election
And on Saturday, October 4, 1980 — 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
As provided by Section 498, Act No. 118, Public Acts of 1954 As Amended.
For the purposes of REVIEWING the REGISTRATION and REGISTERING such of the qualified electors in said TOWNSHIP, CITY or VILLAGE as SHALL PROPERLY apply therefor.
The name of no person but an ACTUAL RESIDENT of the precinct at the time of registration, and entitled under the Constitution, if remaining such resident, to vote at the next election, shall be entered in the registration book.
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Publish: September 23 and October 2, 1980

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