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Tax pays for commuter use of city services

People don't like to pay taxes.

If they have to pay anything, people at least expect the concept of the tax and its implementation to be fair and reasonable for all ages and incomes.

But people are also inconsistent — not to mention hypocritical — when it comes to debating the Detroit city income tax on suburbanites who commute to their jobs in Motown.

To hear some suburban residents and politicians tell it, you'd think that the idea of commuters paying part of the cost of city services they may use during their working hours is something akin to legalized burglary.



Leonard Poger

They don't want to pay taxes for services they perceive as not available to them. That's a log of hogwash.

If a suburban worker in a downtown Detroit bank is injured on the job, the Detroit emergency medical services crew will respond to his needs — not the rescue squad from 20 miles away where the person's mail is delivered.

Most of the current debate concerns the Detroit income tax. But there is an identical proposal on the Dearborn ballot which affects thousands of local residents who work for Ford.

A refreshing point of view on commuter taxes has come from a political figure who hasn't gained fame by being a close friend of Mayor Coleman A. Young of Detroit.

The person is Mayor John O'Reilly of Dearborn.

O'REILLY is campaigning hard for a new Dearborn city income tax which would be levied on residents and non-residents who work in that city. The proposal is on the June 23 ballot.

In a half-page ad in a Dearborn newspaper, the mayor argued a number of solid points in behalf of an income tax on commuters, which is strange for a suburban mayor whose comments may well be used to advance the case for a Detroit income-tax increase for residents and commuters.

In the ad, O'Reilly reveals a number of statistics which show that non-residents in an urban suburb create a significant need for local services.

Since non-residents create a need, they should pay their fair share of financing those services.

It makes perfect sense.

Here are some of O'Reilly's figures.

OF THOSE ARRESTED for felonies last year, 71 percent were non-residents.

Of 428 auto accident victims rushed to hospitals last year, 58 percent were non-residents.

One-fourth of all heart-attack victims taken to hospitals in 1980 were non-residents.

"We're not suggesting that Dearborn stop coming to the aid of people in need," said the mayor's political ad.

"We're just pointing out that ambulance service, like police, wouldn't cost as much if we didn't have our obligation to non-residents."

The mayor also noted that 60 percent of the Henry Ford Centennial Library patrons were from outside Dearborn. Most of those are from the three major colleges in Dearborn.

THE BIG QUESTION now is whether suburban workers who commute to Dearborn will put up as much a fuss about that city's commuter income tax as they are about the Detroit income-tax rate increase.

If they do, we'll know that there is more to the issue of commuter income taxes than black and white.

But that's another story.

Bridging the gap



Kids need everyone's help in preventing child abuse

"But what am I? An infant crying in the night. An infant crying for the light. And with no language but a cry."

— Alfred Tennyson

Derek Webb will be 3 years old Wednesday. His brother, Trevor, is 5. They're not infants, but who hears their cries?

The two little Southfield boys, alleged victims of child abuse, are hospitalized. Derek is battered, bruised and burned. A powerful animal tranquilizer called PCP or "Angel's Dust" was found in his blood stream, police said.

Trevor is painfully thin. Beaumont Hospital authorities say the mood-altering tranquilizer Mellaril was found in his blood. The brothers are improving, but what lies ahead?

Child abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual. It can happen in poor, middle-class and well-to-do homes in rural areas, suburbs and cities like Southfield.

Abused kids sometimes have lifelong emotional or physical handicaps. They often become teenagers and adults who act out in criminal, violent or anti-social ways.

CAROL ANITA Webb, the 26-year-old mother of Derek and Trevor, and her live-in boyfriend Jacob David Sandberg, have been charged with torture and cruelty to children. They will be examined on the charges on Derek's birthday Wednesday in 46th District Court.

Child abuse, according to Oakland County Social Services officials, is a tragedy which affects us all. They say the problem is so serious, we must all get involved and do something about it. Why then were the cries of Derek and Trevor allegedly ignored?

Neighbors in the apartment complex where the Webb family and Sandberg lived say they tried to alert authorities more than a month ago about their concern over the children's welfare. But, they maintain, they couldn't get any help for them.

They say they heard the children crying in the night. They described for police two boys, pale and thin, who stared off blankly into space and didn't seem to play.



Jackie Klein

NEIGHBORS SAY they called child abuse services and were told unless they saw beatings taking place, nothing could be done. An investigation is underway in the State Department of Social Services to determine if the tip to social workers in Oakland County was mishandled.

Common signs of child abuse are repeated injuries, neglected appearance, disruptive, passive or withdrawn behavior, super-critical parents and families who are extremely isolated.

You have to use caution in identifying child abuse. Every parent makes errors in judgment and action at some times. But when it becomes plain that child abuse is becoming a pattern, it's time for help.

The kinds of help needed are immediate treatment, support services and extended counseling. And, officials say, we have a moral and, in some cases, a legal responsibility to see that child abuse is reported to people who can help.

CHILD ABUSE isn't necessarily a symptom of a broken home. It can be a parental problem. People just paid their income tax, the cost of gas is rising, food prices are out of sight and inflation is rampant.

A man who can't afford to feed his family may take his frustrations out on his wife and kids. The wife may be unable to cope with the stresses of bringing up kids and she finds herself screaming and losing control.

Think of all the people in the world who would be great moms and dads but can't have children. It makes you wonder how men and women lucky enough to have kids can mistreat them.

If you give children a little love, you get a great deal back. If it makes us sick and angry that this potential for love is beaten out of battered kids, we must get involved. Otherwise who will hear the cries of children like Derek and Trevor?

Oh, for the life of Jack, an unemployed auto worker

DIARY OF AN UNEMPLOYED WORKER

This is an account of a man forced out of a job by a slumping economy. His reactions, problems and experiences during his ordeal are his alone, and shouldn't be mistaken for what others in the same situation may face.



C.J. Risak

APRIL 1980 — I had just heard the news about Jack.

"He's going to be laid off," my source said. "It's going to happen in a week or so, he's not sure when, but it's going to happen."

Jack Bucks, an old college pal, out of a job. It would drive him crazy, I told the source.

"Don't worry, he'll be working somewhere in a month. He'd go crazy otherwise," I told my informant.

Poor old Jack, I thought as I hung up. I was thinking that very thought the next day when I called Jack and, in an attempt to lift his spirits, told him I'd take him out for a beer.

"Cheer up," I said in the dimly lit bar. "You'll find something else."

Jack, looking neither happy nor sad, gulped down his beer and nodded in agreement. "Yeah," he said. "Like maybe another beer waiting for me when I get back from the can."

"After all, you're buyin'."

He smiled as he headed into the men's room at the far end of the bar. He's taking it pretty well, I thought as I fished some money out of my wallet.

He'll be OK, I figured. He'll get another job pretty fast.

JULY 1980 — Jack Bucks, white male, 25-years-old, bachelor's degree in business administration. Until his layoff, he was employed by Ford Motor Co., with a white-collar job in the truck parts and supplies division. Approximate salary: \$24,000 annually.

That's what I knew about Jack, except that he had been good at his job. An idea that could cut out some unnecessary work for Ford in supplying parts had been accepted by his bosses. Depending on how much money the company saved and how well Jack's plan worked, he was in line for a bonus.

Despite his success, Jack was laid off because Ford, like most companies, judged by seniority. When it happened, I said Jack would have another job in less than a month. He was well-qualified. Someone will snatch him up.

So how come, in July, Jack wasn't working?

He had changed; I learned when I visited him. This was no longer the ambitious, bright, innovative Jack Bucks. He had been transformed.

I KNOCKED on his door. When there was no answer, I just turned the knob and went in.

Jack sat there, stupefied by a blaring TV, insensitive to what was happening around him. I feared he might be in some drug-induced coma when he finally moved, lifting his arm to polish off the last few gulps of his beer.

"How ya doin'?" I asked cautiously. "Buuuurrrrrp," he answered, waving his hand at a chair.

Unemployment had done him in, I figured. Unable to find a job and seeing the last few dollars he had worked so hard to save slip away, he was drowning his problems.

"You know, this won't solve anything," I said after a few minutes.

Life returned to his face — not much, but some — and he asked disinterestedly, "What the hell are you talkin' about?"

"You won't find any answers, or a job for that matter, by sitting here drinking all day."

He looked at me for the first time, and laughed. "Who wants to?" he said.

IN THE NEXT hour, my views on unemployment changed. Especially Jack's unemployment.

In that hour, Jack told me all about the hardships of being out of work.

"I have to go to that damn unemployment office every other Monday morning and wait for two hours for my check!" he said in genuine anger.

"Are you gettin' enough to get by on?" I asked naively.

He smiled. "With TRA (Trade Readjustment Act) and unemployment combined, I get \$525 every two weeks."

I was shocked. Surely, that's before taxes, I said.

"Don't take out taxes," he said as he opened another beer. "I have to pay taxes if I make over \$20,000 this year. But they don't deduct nothin' now."

"That's more than I'm making, and I'm working," I said numbly as he handed me a beer.

"Go ahead, take it," Jack said with a grin. "You look like you need a drink. Don't worry — this one's on me."

After some quick calculating, I figured with a full year off Jack would take home \$13,650 — without any tax deductions. No wonder the economy is slumping, I said to myself.

"You've got it made," I said. "You aren't even looking for work, are you?"

"Why should I?" he answered.

FEBRUARY 1981 — Jack called, the message said. I hadn't seen him in awhile. No real reason. I really didn't like watching TV that much.

"So, what's new?" I asked Jack over the phone.

"Oh, hell, I'm really mad," he answered. "I got a notice today — they're calling me back."

"You mean you're going back to work? That's great!"

"Yeah, I'm going into this different division, working in electronics and new developments, that kinda stuff," he said glumly.

"You can't be that upset," I said to him. "Will you be making as much as before?"

"No," he answered. "I'll be making more. And I'll keep the seniority I had from my other job — as if I had been working the past 10 months. I'll get a raise in a few months and I'll have more vacation time."

I was bummed. For months he sat, hardly looking for work, bringing in more than I was making. And now, just before his one year on unemployment ran out, he got a better job with more money and benefits.

Is there no justice, I wondered. "So what are you so upset about?" I asked.

"Wouldn't you know it? I just went on vacation. Just drove down to Florida, got there early last week, ready to do some heavy partyin'. Called my roommate in Michigan Friday and he said some Ford people called."

"I called them back and they said they wanted me back for an interview, pronto. I no sooner got down there and I had to turn around and come back."

"My whole vacation blown?"

I smiled into the phone. Perhaps it wasn't much, but at least there was a glimmer of justice, I thought.