

Political leaders see danger in U.S. report on cities

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Southeast Michigan political leaders are alarmed at what they consider an anti-Midwest, pro-Sunbelt report put together in the closing days of the Carter Administration.

"Can anyone really believe in sending people to jobs?" asked Michael Glasac, executive director of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, in a conference sponsored by the Metropolitan Affairs Corporation.

The object of concern for big-city, small-city, business, union and black leaders is a report called "Urban America in the Eighties," a 110-page report by Jimmy Carter's President's Commission for a National Agenda.

A panel of regional leaders met on Monday for three hours to grill the report's chief staff man, Donald A. Hicks, who has a doctorate in sociology from North Carolina and is on leave from the University of Texas-Dallas. Answering questions by long-distance telephone were two of the panel's five members: Robert S. Benson, president of Children's World, Inc., Evergreen, Colo.; and Pastora San Juan Caffery, professor of social service administration, University of Chicago.

NO LONGER will big cities be the centers of manufacturing and population they were in the first 70 years of the century, the report says.

"The city will be a much narrower institution, serving people who reside in and near it with a narrower range of services," Hicks said.

These services will be governmental,

cultural, educational, financial and recreation, (including conventions). Residents will tend to be young, single, professional and married but without children.

"It's unlikely the city will be all things to all people," Hicks said. "Cities might be smaller and might have fewer jobs. But it (the national trend) is not the decline of the city or the death of the city. It's the change of the city."

Rather than using federal policy and dollars to buck the inevitable, Hicks urged civic leaders to understand the trend and look for new ways for urban areas to be viable.

U.S. REP. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, a leader in the Northeast-Midwest Coalition of congressmen, told the panel his group had a "head-to-head debate" with Hicks. "We went after him," Pursell said.

"What we have is a fight reminiscent of the Civil War. This kind of study has profound implications. There is a federal budget of \$780 billion a year. The question is, Should we target older cities or build new programs for the South and Southwest — water projects, highways?"

"Wouldn't it be cheaper to hold up old areas (of the nation) and create jobs there without asking people to move out and relocate?"

"WE DON'T ask people to move," Hicks answered. "There is already much movement. There is some movement within metropolitan areas."

"But the federal budget is relatively insignificant and impotent" in helping cities. "Public investment is small vs.

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— Donald A. Hicks
chief staff man,
report on Urban America

private investment.

"You have come to believe public policy is the determinant of things. Our political system depends on people representing turf, on boundaries."

Aiming at Pursell, Hicks said, "I do not appreciate that kind of divisiveness in urban policy debate."

"You're coming out of Texas," Pur-

sell shot back. "We know that. People of the Northeast-Midwest are in one helluva fight. We're talking about big money."

Hicks answered, "I was born in Buffalo, N.Y., and raised in South Bend. I don't appreciate the arrogance of the South and Southwest."

THE DEBATE revolved around the

importance of the federal budget in determining the fate of Northern cities.

"I would trade an urban grant for a Kennedy Space Center any time," said Roy Levy Williams, president of the Detroit Urban League.

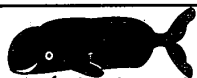
"We're talking about not just revitalization but where the federal government puts jobs. We in the Northeast have been subsidizing the Sunbelt for some time."

Hicks replied that although initial defense contracts go first to Western states with high-technology industries, "Those federal dollars don't just go there and stay. They bounce back to the Northeast through the subcontracting process."

BY TELEPHONE, Benson told the southeast Michigan leaders the urban report proposed to shift federal policy away from "place-oriented" programs to "people-oriented" programs.

Prof. Caffery added there was "nothing Machiavellian" when the federal government aided suburbanization in the 1950s and '60s by underwriting mortgages on homes. "People just wanted to get away (from big cities) and have a half-acre of land."

She went on, "Migration will take place," adding the thrust of federal policy should be to aid people rather than places. Federal programs can't reverse trends," she said.



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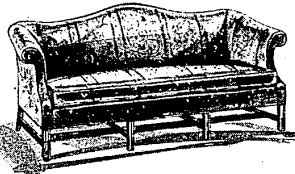
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