

Politicians cautious — Romney

Says private group should lead recovery

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A privately run organization, not the Great Lakes Governors Association, should spearhead regional economic recovery, according to former Michigan Gov. George W. Romney.

"The most cautious people are elected officials," Romney said in a vigorous dissent at the end of a two-day, six-state conference in Detroit. "You're putting the governors in charge."

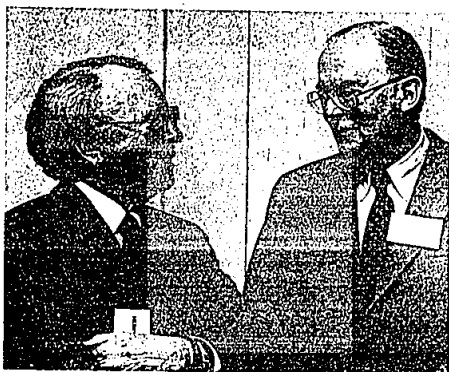
The 76-year-old former president of American Motors, former Cabinet official and current Wayne State University board member was reacting to a task force proposal on "interstate teamwork." That group, chaired by Cincinnati Mayor Thomas Brush, proposed the conference's suggestions be carried out by the governors' association.

"THE GOVERNORS should create the permanent structure," said Brush, delivering the last of eight task force reports at the conclusion of a conference hosted by Detroit Edison Co.

"The last thing we need is another organization," agreed Edison's Walter J. McCarthy, the Birmingham resident who chaired the gathering of 120 public officials, business executives and labor leaders.

The white-haired Romney was fired up, however. "New England had problems with the loss of its textile and shoe plants. New England surmounted its problems. . . Today, Massachusetts has the least unemployment in the country," Romney said.

"The key instrument was the New England Council — more of a private structure. It was authoritative. . . It shaped programs for the governors and legislators and educated the public. It was a private source of accurate information and private support," the Bloomfield Hills resident said.



Roger B. Smith (left), chairman of General Motors Corp., is greeted by Walter J. McCarthy Jr., chairman of Detroit Edison Co., at the Congress on the Economic Future of the Great Lakes States in Detroit last week.

MCCARTHY SAID he would assemble a group of 10 or 15 of the conferees to assemble in January, prioritize the 75 to 100 suggestions — including Romney's — and "germinate the seeds" by referring them to a continuing organization.

The conference, called a Congress on the Economic Future of the Great Lakes states, drew participants and reporters from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. (Although Pennsylvania and New York have some Great Lakes shoreline, the major parts of their populations are close to the Eastern Seaboard.)

Asked by a reporter if he could sum-

marize the gist of the eight task force reports, McCarthy quipped, "No." But he added that the thread running through them was Great Lakes regionalism — the feeling that the six states have common problems, common assets, common political needs and a need to work together.

Here are some of the suggestions:

FEDERAL ALLOCATIONS — "We're getting the shaft from the federal government," said Harold Bergen, policy director for the governor of Wisconsin. He said the Great Lakes states in five years had sent \$164 billion more in taxes to Washington than the federal

government had spent on them. "The heart of the problem is defense, both procurement and bases," Bergen said. While Sunbelt military bases have been in place 30 or more years, his task force proposed the lakes states seek more competitive bidding procedures and less "sole source" bidding by the Defense Department. It also asked prime defense contractors to subcontract more of their work to plants in the Great Lakes states.

A second problem, he said, is that formulas for allocating federal aid place much emphasis on income levels, which hurts the high-income, industrialized lakes states. The group advocated new formulas emphasizing tax burdens.

Lake state congressmen should make sure the environmental cleanup "superfund" is adequately financed because "most toxic sites are in our region."

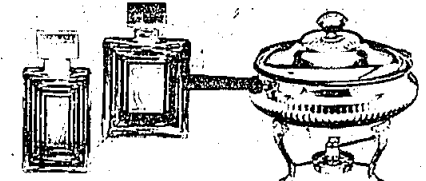
INFRASTRUCTURE — With 400,000 miles in paved highways, 33,000 miles of railroads and a wealth of engineering talent, "our best days are ahead of us," reported James C. Kellogg, executive secretary of the Midwest High-Speed Rail Compact in Lansing.

His group urged the region to develop high-speed, intercity "bullet trains." It expressed fear the lakes states will be "on the short end" of federal rapid transit money.

Kellogg, a Transportation Department official in the former Milliken administration, said lakes congressmen will have to fight for better road aid formulas, citing the freeze-thaw cycles which damage Northeastern roads. "Some programs are geared to new construction (in the Sunbelt) to the exclusion of rebuilding (in older Northeastern states)," he said.



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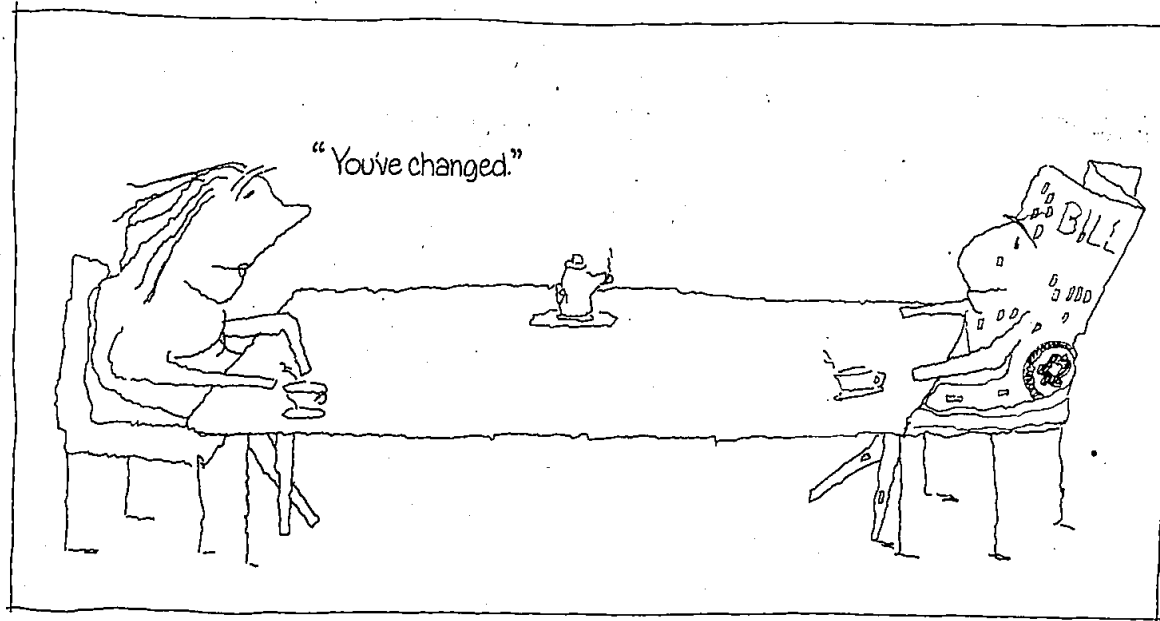


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