

## Politics no tea party

From the looks of the opening rounds, 1984 is going to be a good year — at least for those of us who enjoy the local political scene.

From the gang up at Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road (Farmington Hills council) to the guys on Liberty (Farmington City council), political tides are beginning to move. And, of course, we dare not forget that taciturn hunch who regale the top of Shilawasse Hill, the Farmington School Board.

This could be the year that politics comes back into fashion in the greater Farmington area.

Let's examine some of the recent events — just in case you've been doing something silly like lying around in the sun on some tropical isle.

**THE APPLAUSE** is all for Farmington School District Supt. Lew Schulman over on Shilawasse Hill for the way he handled the recent "Burger Bash" controversy concerning religious involvement by staff members during school hours. What a fine job he did in dealing with what could have been a very nasty situation.

Good job Lew.

I would have applauded for you at the meeting but School Board Trustee Susan Rennels frowns on freedom of expression at public meetings. Must be that League of Women Voters upbringing.

Our newest school board member must learn that she is now in the political arena where debate, applause, cheering, booing and hissing all are encouraged. Democracy is to be enjoyed — the harder, the better. It isn't to be conducted like an afternoon tea.

Hard to believe that the moderator of the Lincoln-Douglas debates would have added anything to history by shushing the crowd.

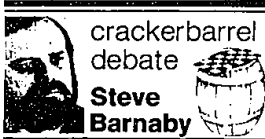
Persons who are concerned enough to participate in a public meeting shouldn't have to be subjected to a school-marm-type scolding.

**BOB DEADMAN** and the city of Farmington men's club, meanwhile, are taking a hard and heavy look at the future of downtown Farmington business.

What is particularly interesting is the \$15,000 study which will take a peak at the parking problem. Some peak. Some problem.

Considering the development of more and more shopping malls in this area, the downtown Farmington area has to have something done with it or the economic roller coaster will all be downhill for it.

Certainly no criticism from these quar-



ters on the look-see at downtown rehabilitation. A lot sure could be done. Alternatives to the present parking situation certainly could raise some eyebrows.

Just mention the word parking structure or parking meter and some folks in these here parts shiver and shake.

But it sure would be nice to bring the 1950s-style shopping mall into the present decade. Downtown Farmington may have been state-of-the-art three decades ago. But today, shoppers demand much more. And they're getting it from malls located away from Grand River and Farmington Road.

Betcha Deadman and the rest would like to hear your ideas on what to do about parking and other downtown matters. Now about that fountain...

**THE INFAMOUS GANG** up at the corner of Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road quickly found themselves in the middle of a political battle with the announcement by recently re-elected Councilman Fred Hughes that he was resigning to take employment elsewhere.

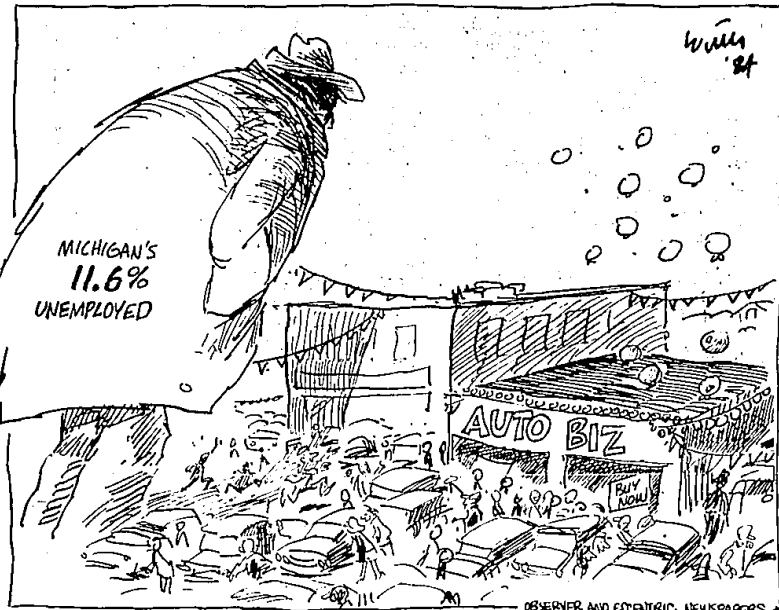
With firebrands Joe Alkateeb and Joan Dudley back in the council saddle, debate about anything and everything should be pretty hot.

But here the season just starts and the political balance of council has been disrupted. The outcome of this fray could determine whether voters will be getting a dose of conservative or progressive decisions from city hall for some time to come.

Alliances seem to be developing along a decidedly male vs. female theme. And good old Mayor Charlie Williams isn't helping that split any by continually extolling the virtues of the Jaycees — an organization which forbids membership to women.

So far only twice-defeated council hopeful Terry Sever and political activist Aldo Vagnozzi have declared interest in filling the vacancy.

If you're interested, get that resume to City Clerk Floyd Cairns by Jan. 30 at 4 p.m. Be on time. Floyd doesn't mess around. Thirty seconds after 4 p.m. and you'll be out of the game.



## Your town — tomorrow's core?

MOST OF US like to believe we live in a classless society, where every mother can hope that someday her child will grow up to be president.

That may be a myth, according to Robert Fish, a researcher at Wayne State University. Fish works in the Bureau of Business Research in the School of Business Administration.

He recently wrote an economic report entitled, "Detroit: Suburbs and City." Fish spent many hours studying the 1980 census — specifically, areas of population, housing, manufacturing and retail trade.

Using several economic indicators, he divided our part of suburban Detroit into class sectors:

- Upper class: Bloomfield Township, Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield Township, Birmingham, Troy, Avon Township, Canton Township and Plymouth Township.
- Upper middle class: Southfield, Livonia and Redford Township.
- Lower middle class: Garden City and Westland.

**FISH'S THEORY** is that socioeconomic groups reside in distinct areas, which he calls sectors. Each sector consists of a collection of adjacent municipalities that share a major transportation corridor.

According to Fish, the key to knowing your place on the class scale is the value of your house.



Nick Sharkey

"Value of residence is a direct and visible indication of family income," he said.

Thus, Fish determined a ratio for comparing the values of houses in metropolitan Detroit. He calculated the value of the average house and gave it a factor of 1.0. House value ratios in the Observer & Eclectic area range from 1.11 in Garden City and Westland to 2.93 for Bloomfield Township.

Fish used other information in the 1980 census data including the year a house was built and occupations of residents.

Guided by transportation corridors, sectors move continuously from the core of Detroit, he found. "High income families eventually desire now, improved housing, and these houses will be built on open land surrounding the urban area."

Houses vacated by high income families are acquired by middle income families, who want relatively newer housing. Low income families move into formerly middle income areas.

At the end of the chain is the central core. It is dotted with vacant houses and lots.

UNFORTUNATELY, what Fish theorizes seems to be real. Take a drive through the central city of Detroit if you doubt it.

For suburbanites, there is little comfort in Fish's sector theory. Tomorrow your suburban city may be today's central core.

As an example, the 1980 census showed fewer suburbanites working in downtown Detroit than in 1970. Major corporations shifted their offices to places like Southfield and Troy.

Fish predicts that people working in Southfield and Troy will move north and commute via I-75 and M-24 (to Troy) and; the proposed extension of M-275 and I-696 (to Southfield).

Fish projects a new upper class sector may be created in the Clarkston-Lake Orion area.

**RUNNING AWAY** to more remote suburban areas is no solution to urban ills. Problems will only follow. One suburb's growth comes at the expense of another suburb closer to Detroit.

A better response is to stay and solve the problems.

Suburbanites who want to put on mental blinders and ignore the problems of Detroit had better think about Fish's findings.

## Schools need families

**REACTION FROM** educators was swift and predictable. As soon as U.S. Secretary of Education T.H. Bell's report hit the wires, they were asking for more money — particularly from the federal government.

"We need more money to improve education," intoned Mary H. Futrell, president of the National Education Association.

A "national equalization program" was called for by Paul Salmon, executive director of the American Society of School Administrators.

"Propaganda," Scott Widmeyer of the American Federation of Teachers scoffed at the Bell report. "I don't think the public will buy the Reagan line that money doesn't buy excellence."

Bell's report last week showed that American College Test (ACT) scores, used as college admissions tests, dropped in all 50 states between 1972 and 1982. In the same period, school dropout rates rose.

His department's numbers supported the "A Nation at Risk" contention that American education is suffering from "a rising tide of mediocrity."

**CAN MORE MONEY** solve educational problems? Consider three other states and Michigan:

• Idaho — 37th in teacher salaries, 44th in per-pupil spending on schools, but tied for 10th in ACT scores.

• South Dakota — 47th in teacher salaries, 43rd in per-pupil spending, 8th on the ACT.

• New Hampshire — a dismal 48th in teacher salaries, 28th in per-pupil spending but first on the ACT.

• Michigan — a soaring 13th in teacher salaries, 19th in per-pupil spending (due to large class sizes), and below Idaho, South Dakota and New Hampshire in ACT scores.

One could build a case that reducing teacher salaries would lead to better student test scores, that Michigan's soaring property taxes have brought us only fat teacher salaries and no results.

**BUT THAT** wouldn't be true. High spending on schools will neither guarantee good test score nor fatten teachers into indolence.

That is because schools are only one instrument of education, and not necessarily the most important.

Back before 1970 when he was a presidential counselor, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York said, "Schools don't count; families do."

In 1984 school officials in Idaho, New Hampshire and South Dakota said much the same. They credited parent involvement, community involvement, discipline and a lack of "large industrial state" problems for their high scores.

Underline "parent involvement" about 19 times and circle it in red.

**SCHOOLS TOOK** too much credit when test scores were rising, dropout rates falling and increasing percentages of kids went to college.

Today, they are getting too much blame for poor performances.

Bell's department now needs to correlate test scores and dropout rates to such sociological factors as the illegitimate birth rate (50 percent in some big city neighborhoods) and the breakup of families. That would be a bombshell.

A good guess is that the data will show what we perceive as an "education problem" is less a "schools problem" than a "families problem."

And it won't be solved by adjusting tax money for schools — either up or down.

—Tim Richard

## Tax cutters need cost-cut plan

**SENATE REPUBLICAN** Leader John Engler of Mt. Pleasant was on the campaign trail this week when he predicted the state Legislature will pass a bill to lower the state's personal income tax rate.

Engler based his prediction on Republicans winning two state Senate seats vacated by the recalls of Democrats Philip Mastin and David Serotkin.

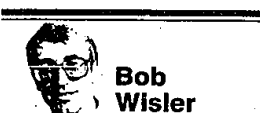
His theory is that Republicans will control the Senate 20-18 and that the Democratic majority in the House won't matter because state representatives are up for re-election this year, and even Democrats can be expected to jump on a tax-cut bandwagon in order to assure re-election.

The Senate Republican leader assumes, probably accurately, that legislators believe there is no greater evil than not being re-elected.

**IN FACT**, if legislators could have known what kind of uproar would follow their approving the state tax hike in March, Gov. James J. Blanchard probably would have failed to convince them to pass it.

But at this point, Engler's dangling the carrot of a tax cut before the voting public is little more than a calculated political maneuver designed to improve GOP chances of victory in the two open Senate districts.

His promise to lighten the load of tax-



Bob Wisler

payers is not accompanied by any statement concerning how the Legislature, or the state government, can cut the budget to make up for a revenue decrease.

Engler claims that because of a surplus the state can cut a half-percent of the now 6.1-percent tax without any cut in services or expenditures. The surplus, however, can easily be used up making up the deficits incurred by previous administrations.

The tax rate which went up from 4.6 to 6.35 in March recently dropped to 6.1 and is set to drop to 5.35 next year.

**BLANCHARD**, who inherited a host of fiscal problems from former Gov. William Milliken and from a devastating recession, has said this tax increase was absolutely necessary for the state to continue to provide the services people expect.

Blanchard has threatened to veto any tax-cut bill which will decrease the temporary tax before next January.

Whether you can agree with Blanchard's premise or not, at least he has provided supporting documentation and has accompanied his tax increase request with decreases in state spending and state employees.

The Legislature, despite having had almost a year to come up with alternatives, continues to operate without any clear ideas for getting a handle on state spending.

**ENGLER SAID** recently that Republicans plan to make education a 1984 campaign issue. The entire state education program was aided by the tax increase engineered by Blanchard, but there is scant evidence that either Blanchard or the Legislature is moving to hold the line on education costs.

There is little evidence that the Legislature or the governor is doing anything either to control the state's most voracious monster, the Department of Social Services.

While it is understandable that politicians will say what the public wants to hear, we should expect that any political promise of a premature tax cut be accompanied by a clear program for reducing state expenditures without abandoning essential programs.

The lack of such a program indicates more political rhetoric. Such rhetoric may win votes, but it doesn't lead to fiscal responsibility.