

OBSERVATION POINT

What Is Perfectly Clear Is That

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Observerland, Jan. 6 -- "How on earth," people ask, "can you write a weekly column on life here in the suburbs, mixing wit with wisdom, point with profundity?"

As we face the first week in this new year of 1971, I can now reveal that the answer is, "With perseverance."

You start writing sentences which don't seem to be going anywhere. Then you throw them away and start over, and before long you have a column which

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- There can be little doubt that the central crisis confronting suburban communities in this area during this new year will be finances. With inflation steadily eating away at a limited tax base and taxpayer revolts springing up like

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- Those who try to claim that the central crisis confronting suburban communities in this area during the coming new year will be finances are clearly wrong. The evidence is plain that drug abuse, especially in our schools, is at the heart

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- Those who claim that financial crisis will swamp suburban communities in this area dur-

ing the new year would be well advised to look at the situation in Farmington Township, where

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- In a small, dusty room, little known to any but the most astute observers of the scene, sits a smart, canny, finance-wise financial advisor to a suburban community in this area. Asked about the coming financial crisis in the coming year, he furrowed his brow and

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- The debate about the coming financial crisis in the suburbs is absurd. What is as clear as

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- How will, the little guy, the average taxpayer, fare during the coming suburban financial crisis? That is the real question as experts settle down to

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- "I'm fed up with suburban financial crises," said my barber, speaking for the great vocal majority of the American people. "Let's talk about football."

There is no doubt whatsoever that more football is just what is needed, especially here in the suburbs, where

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- After a weekend filled with

football games on TV, none including the Detroit Lions, it is clear that most folks in the suburbs have had their fill of the great American game.

Housewives, especially, are anxious to get their husbands back to serious consideration of the financial crisis which

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6 -- "Look here," said my wise old barber, "all those so-called experts about financial crises couldn't be sillier. Now if they would listen to the tax plan me and my buddy worked out a couple months ago when we were deer hunting.

"You start by

OBSERVERLAND, JAN. 6

Where Does One Pay Redford Taxes?

Is the Redford Township treasurer's office in the Township Hall on Beech Daly Road, one block south of Five Mile Road? Or is it located in one of the banking institutions located in the township which handle township funds?

These have to be the questions on the lips of many residents following last week's fi-

asco over the issuance of the 1970 tax bills.

True enough, the tax bills didn't arrive at the treasurer's office, in the Township Hall, until sometime Tuesday -- just two days before the deadline for payment to have the taxes reflect on the income tax report for 1970.

True enough that Treasurer Edward Kennedy doubled his staff to get the bills sorted out for easier distribution to those who jammed the offices Wednesday and Thursday to, first, pick up the tax statements, and second, to pay them.

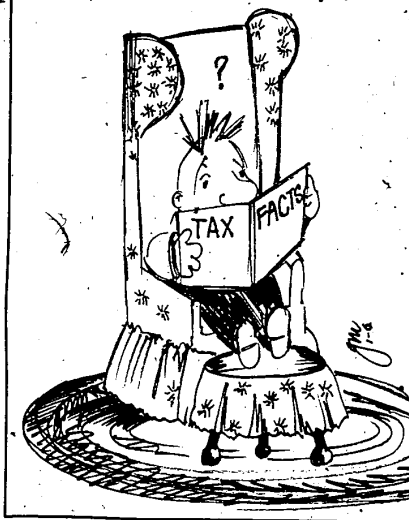
WE HAVE to accuse the treasurer's office of using poor judgement in telling homeowners that they could pick up the statements merely by getting in line and waiting their turn.

A phone call earlier in the week brought the information that one could pick up the tax bill personally -- there wasn't any qualifications; just drop by and you could get your bill.

There wasn't anything said about the provision that you also had to have the paid tax bill from 1969.

So, promptly at 9 a.m., we got in line just like many others on Wednesday morning -- in fact there were about 20 ahead of us. We gradually moved up until we finally arrived at the window where the

A REAL WHO DUNNIT



R.T. Thompson writes

clerk asked for last year's tax bill.

"Can't give you the new statement unless we have the one for last year," she said. "We just don't have time to look through the list by name, we must have the subdivision number, lot number and..." By this time we stormed out of the building and drove back home to get the year old bill.

THEN BACK to the Township Hall, back in line again, only there were about 35 ahead this time. Then gradually moving to the window where the clerk quickly produced the tax statement after checking the previous receipt.

We reached into our pocket and quickly produced enough cash to pay the bill.

"Sorry, we're not taking payments here, you'll have to go to one of the banks," came from behind the window.

All of which brings up the point: What is the treasurer's office for if not to take payment of taxes. The sign over the window reads "Cashier -- Taxes." The sign over the department door says "Treasurer's Office." After standing in line for the better part of two hours, with money in hand just like so many others, why

didn't the treasurer's office function as it should?

WE REALIZE that Treasurer Kennedy was put in a bind by the county when it didn't get the tax bills to him until two days before the deadline, but is that any reason why adjustments couldn't be made so that those with checks and cash could have their bill stamped paid?

In our book, the township treasurer did not take care of the store as he should have. It's bad enough that taxpayers have to stand in line for a couple hours to receive their bills...but then to be denied the privilege of making payment, being told to go to some other place!!!!

We saw homeowners, well into the 70-year-old bracket, standing in line and their practically willing when informed: "Sorry, you can't pay here."

It is absolutely ridiculous that such incidents take place in this day and age. The Township Board has no qualms in budgeting the money to the final penny. Why doesn't it make sure that every taxpayer is able to pay his tax bill at the treasurer's office instead of racing around the township for a bank?

Tim Richard writes

Taxes Skyrocketed..But Why?

Like most Observerland residents, this writer got hit by an increase when the property tax bills came out in December -- in this case, a little better than \$60.

Why? Was anyone raising the rate? Hadn't all those school issues gone down to defeat? Was it the city? the county? the community college? the assessment? the equalization factor?

The tax bill wasn't much help. It listed all the various units of government who had their fingers in my pocket, but it failed to tell why the total bill was \$60-plus HIGHER than a year ago.

AHA, HERE'S a little four-page pamphlet called "Tax Facts." Maybe it will tell. "Please read this pamphlet carefully. It contains the answers to questions most frequently asked concerning your tax bill," said the opening line.

Good idea. If you're going to get socked for taxes, they ought to at least tell you why. Let's see if we can find why our taxes went UP.

Well, the first paragraph is about the duties of the city treasurer and contains a disclaimer: "The city treasurer has no authority to reduce the amount of your tax bill."

I already knew that. What I want to know now is why I'm paying MORE this year. Let's try the second paragraph.

"Tax collection procedure," it says, and at this point the city treasurer of Livonia, Carl J. Wagenschutz, says you have to make the check payable to him. He prints his name in capital letters, but he doesn't say why the taxes went UP. Let's try page two.

PAGE TWO is called "distribution of taxes." It tells what rates we're paying for county operating, county drain, school operating, special

education, community college and the city, along with the total. There follows a breakdown on the city rate (but no breakdown on the other units).

Very interesting, Mr. Wagenschutz, but why did the taxes go UP this year?

"Attention -- very important -- read carefully," says the heading at the bottom of page two. Here we are told that the tax roll and bills were prepared by electronic data processing equipment. Treasurer Wagenschutz gets his name in for the third time. But we still don't find out why the taxes went UP. Let's try page three.

Page three is a chart with the allocations of the property tax dollar. "The government of the City of Livonia receives, and is responsible for, only 17 per cent of your total tax dollar," it says here.

A clever trick is used here. The school, college and county taxes are shown in grey, but the city portion is shown in white. The old "white hat" theory, slightly modified.

BUT WHY DID the taxes go UP? City Treasurer Carl J. Wagenschutz never answers. Let's try page four.

On page four is the city budget. Funny, the city is responsible for only 17 per cent of every property tax dollar, but the pamphlet has one-third of its space filled with city fiscal information and nothing but a total rate for the other units.

And once again, we never get an answer to the question: Why did taxes go UP?

Like most city and township treasurers probably, Carl J. Wagenschutz, city treasurer of Livonia, has missed an excellent chance to communicate directly with the taxpaying public. The man charged by state law with collecting all local property taxes never, in four pages, gets around to saying why taxes went UP.

Bob McClellan writes

Army Just Didn't Care

Most of Observerland knows today the plight of Army Pfc. Don Dixon and his wife, Kathy, and grieves with them in the loss of their 20-month old son, Timmy, who died of cancer.

And readers of this newspaper no doubt realize the enormous strain placed upon the Westland mother of two and her Vietnam-based husband.

Besides facing the ominous prospect that their oldest son must die, the couple also had to cope with the fact that their youngest child, six-month-old Jamie, was suffering from bronchial pneumonia. Doctors, fortunately, expect the husky baby to recover.

THIS, IT SEEMS, would be ordeal enough for these young people. But, for them, another

discouraging element comes into play.

Kathy receives a monthly allotment of \$145 from the Army. As anyone rearing two children knows, this sum cannot do the job in today's spiraling economy.

Thus, Kathy was forced to take her case to welfare authorities. They have helped. Good. All indications are that the welfare money has reached the right hands and will be well spent.

But the sober mind cannot help but ask these questions:

"Why was the wife of a soldier in Vietnam -- a mother of two sick children -- forced to resort to welfare officials in the first place? Why didn't the military step in and help this

distressed mother long before she was driven to seek outside relief?"

Certainly the answer cannot be that the U.S. Army lacks the wherewithal to give financial aid in an obviously grim situation. Certainly the answer cannot be that the U.S. Army lacked knowledge of the young couple's plight.

It seems the only logical conclusion is that the military really doesn't care about its responsibilities when they affect an obscure U.S. Army private in Vietnam.

And if this is the case, there should be no reason for the nation's adults to shake their heads in amazement when a youth shoots himself in the foot or slips across the border into Canada to escape the draft.

Editorial & Opinion

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