

points of view

Events heading toward hefty state tax increase

I TOLD YOU so last November, and now I'll tell you again.

Michigan is headed for a hefty state tax increase. It may be a year or more away, but the pressures are building.

My prediction was based on the desires for a property tax cut plus several major lawsuits. If any two events occur, Michigan's \$7.6 billion budget will be so far out of whack that only a major infusion of new revenue can balance it.

LAST WEEK they settled the Oakland mental health lawsuit. It's heavy reading, but you need to understand it.

Lansing is required constitutionally (if the amendment) to give 11.5 percent of its budget to local units. Early in the 1980s, the state turned over community mental health programs to the counties and counted the money as part of the state's 41.6 percent share.

Oakland County called it a sham, sued, won in the lower courts and likely would have won in the Supreme Court.

Gubernatorial candidate John Engler vowed to settle the case, and Gov. Engler did settle, though not on terms he wanted.

Engler's people offered \$25 million to Oakland County only. Nuts, said the county board — pay off everyone.

Engler wisely agreed. It will cost the state \$400 million in the fiscal 1993 budget.

Dick Headlee, though not a party



Tim Richard

to the suit, staged the signing ceremonies at his Farmington Hills corporate digs. "I feel vindicated," he said. He was correct.

ENGLER AND House Democrats Friday cut a deal on the 1991 budget.

Few details were released, but the handouts said the deal relies on one-time bookkeeping changes. In other words, big budget cuts will have to be made in fiscal 1992 and the following years.

The deal calls for spending \$316 million more in the current year than last year.

Are you counting? By October 1992, the budget will be \$709 million, or one-tenth, out of kilter.

MEANWHILE, many folks would like a property tax cut.

Headlee's Taxpayers United has petitioned for a 20 percent across-the-board cut, the state to make up the loss to local units. Engler proposed 20 percent for schools alone, which would cost 65 percent as much.

Engler's plan is dead in the Legislature. Headlee's petition drive was stalled in the Board of Canvassers, so his people are asking a court to force it on the ballot.

I happen to doubt TU had enough signatures, but suppose I'm wrong, suppose the courts put the \$1 billion-plus property tax cut on the 1992 ballot, and suppose people adopt the "vote yourself a living" philosophy and approve the tax cut.

In two more years, the budget imbalance tops \$3 billion.

There's your state tax increase. No way out.

EVEN IF TU's tax cut dies, there's more budget trouble.

Plenty of other lawsuits like the Oakland mental health case are floating around. The state has to lose only one to be behind the eight ball.

The out-of-formula school districts deserve to win theirs. Lansing mandates special education, bilingual and 17 other services, but won't pay them \$72 million to do the job. It may take them six years to win, as it took Oakland County six years, but their victory is inevitable.

Then there's the court funds suit. Lansing pays all costs of Detroit and Wayne County courts, and everyone else is cheated. If (when) they win, Lansing is out another \$250 million.

Meanwhile, we're doing dirt to our poorer school districts.

And so on.

Don't think of me as a liberal advocating a tax hike. Think of me as a seismic geologist, studying the earth's movements and predicting a quake.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional news.

Sprawl gobbles up our urban centers

URBAN SPRAWL. URBAN GOBBLE. An unpretty thought, and an unpretty sight. Even the words sound ugly.

By 2010, when the kids born today are college sophomores, a quarter of a million more acres of lovely woodland and nourishing farmland will have been gobbled up forever in southeast Michigan — an area notorious for abandoning what was once prime land to the south, fanning out from its great river, our father of waters.

In the northern suburbs, new single-family mansions costing half-a-million dollars each encroach on what was once miles of precious topsoil for corn and wheat, soon to be surrounded by an endless sweep of parking lot and megamall.

In mother Detroit, thousands of houses stand vacant. Or, like mine and my grandparents on 16th and 12th streets, they are gone — replaced by rats and rubble and weeds and broken glass, while hundreds of thousands of people double up with relatives or cram into the urban periphery in high-priced rental units, and thousands of others are rendered homeless.

White flight and middle-class black flight have helped to cause Detroit's once-matches schools to deteriorate, her city services to evaporate, her remaining homes to plummet in value, and crime to engulf her neighborhoods. I cry from my heart over what has hap-



John Telford

pened to the city where I was born and raised and at night in dreams I return. I cry for all the cities like her throughout America.

WHAT I SAID in a Detroit Free Press article nearly four years ago weighs even heavier today: Through rampant racism and reckless greed, we have allowed our great urban heartlands to degenerate into a kind of Casbah-style residential, economic and educational Third World.

One way to halt this sprawl in the greater Detroit area with its hundreds of municipalities and scores of school districts would be to adopt a common tax base across the boundaries of all of these governmental and educational units and consolidate some of the smaller ones.

Simultaneously, of course, we must reject the insanity called prejudice, and we must obliterate the drug trade — but that's grist for other columns.

What we have let happen to our urban centers in this country has brought us face-to-face with the very same deepening inequities we fought in the 1950s and thought we had permanently reversed in the 1960s. Walls of injustice loom in many ominous forms, and all are not as visually concrete as was the late and unlamented one that divided East from West Germany.

As so often has been said by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, Eight Mile has been and still is a symbolic wall that physically and spiritually separates Americans. When

Robert Frost wrote, "Good fences make good neighbors," he was being bitterly ironic.

LET US HOPE that the dismantling of the Berlin Wall can be a constant reminder that "walls must not be a prison make," whether they be actual concrete or equally divisive social and economic restrictions. In order to win in the global marketplace and in the morally murky waters of geopolitics, Americans must capitalize on every citizen's fully developed talents. This cannot happen in an economically and racially segregated setting.

As a member of the U.S. track team, I raced in Europe on victorious sprint relay squads, passing the baton to American athletes of both African and European ancestry. We weren't black or white, we were red, white and blue.

U.S. soldiers of all ethnic backgrounds helped to win the Persian Gulf war. As runners in a relay race do, we need each other on the American team more desperately now than ever if our nation is to survive as a republic. Blacks need whites; whites need blacks. Suburbanites need urbanites; Arab-Americans need Jewish-Americans; white collar workers need blue collar workers; Hispanics need Asian-Americans; and so on.

Americans always will need their diverse — and diversely talented — countrymen and women as co-workers, neighbors, classmates and friends.

Let's not wait any longer. All of us in the northern reaches of southeast Michigan must unite now to reverse this lemming-like, ever-farther-northward gobble and sprawl. Let us cast our eyes southward again toward our roots near the great river and join hands with our neighbors there to reaffirm our red-white-and-blue commitment to realize a shared American dream.

I cry from my heart over what has happened to the city where I was born and raised and at night in dreams I return. I cry for all the cities like her throughout America.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5623) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to

help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

Be Creative!

Be part of an out-of-this-world museum exhibit. . .

DESTINATION: SPACE

What kind of space is our friendly astronaut floating in? Is there a moon behind him/her? Do you see Saturn? Perhaps there is a nearby galaxy or one light-years away? Grab your pens, markers, paint, crayons or a plain old pencil and give our astronaut a place in space as part of Cranbrook Institute of Science's DESTINATION: SPACE Art Exhibit.

Then when you've finished, fill in your name, the city you live in, and your age, and mail or deliver your completed picture to:

CRANBROOK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
DESTINATION: SPACE Art Exhibit
500 Lone Pine Road, Box 801
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0801

All entries must be submitted by Monday, July 1, 1991

Bring your free pass to receive free admission from opening weekend, July 13-14 through Sunday, September 1, 1991.

You may win special DESTINATION: SPACE prizes during opening weekend!

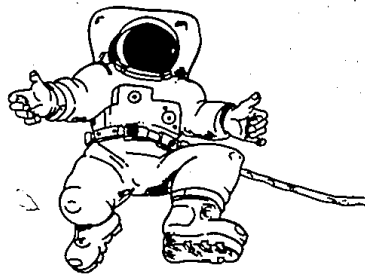
Artwork received by July 1 will be displayed throughout the summer in the DESTINATION: SPACE art exhibit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL
645-3221

SPACE ARTIST'S FREE ADMISSION PASS

JULY 13 — SEPTEMBER 1, 1991
CRANBROOK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
500 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills
between Woodward and Lahser
645-3200

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZIP _____



Space Artist's Name: _____

Age: _____

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