

OBSERVATION POINT

Is Alcohol Only Issue Involving 18-Year-Olds?

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Maybe we shouldn't have been surprised at the silly way the two Detroit newspapers treated the story.

The News' headline said "Panel asks drinking at age 18," which distorted the story.

The Free Press next day put a question in its "Sound Off" column which said: "A special governor's commission has recommended that the legal age for buying and drinking alcohol be lowered to 18. Do you agree?"

Thus, as the Governor's Special Commission on the Age of Majority was suggesting one of the most far-reaching and well-researched changes in our social system, the big papers reduced the issue to the one thing they understand best—alcohol.

THE TRUTH is that the governor's commission, headed by Judge Frank Millner of Cadillac, was proposing that the age of full adult responsibility—for everything—be dropped to 18.

It means not just rights, like voting in state and local elections or drinking. It also means responsibilities, like serving on juries, not being able to back out of contracts, and being subject to more criminal laws.

That, you must agree is a pretty bold step. It's a daring step, too, because our society has been used to coddling kids, whether the kids wanted to be coddled or not, by preventing them from taking on responsibilities for as long as possible.

Such a proposal doesn't deserve a headline: "Panel asks drinking at age 18."

IT'S FUNNY the way people react to legal rights for the 18-20 age group.

In 1967 a committee submitted a similar report to the British Parliament, and the drinking question stirred little controversy. What got the British all hot and bothered was the idea of allowing the under-21s to marry without parental consent.

In Michigan, the central question, in some twisted minds, seems to be booze.

Nevertheless, the Free Press survey on 18-year-old drinking got a favorable response from 63.8 per cent, disagreement from only 36.2 per cent. ("Never believe the Free Press surveys," a friend advises me. "One day I called in six times.")

If you were to ask me about 18-year-old drinking, just like

that, I'd be a bit hesitant. It's a bad question.

A fairer way to ask the question might be like this:

"If 18-year-olds are to be subject to jury duty, shouldn't they also have the right to drink?"

Or, "If 18-year-olds can be arrested in felony cases and have their earnings taxed, shouldn't they also be able to go into business—and drink?"

Last fall, voters in Observerland opposed the 18-year-old vote by margins ranging from 60 to 68 per cent. Yet when Observer Newspapers reporters talk to individual voters and ask them if the young folks shouldn't have both rights and legal responsibilities, the response is overwhelmingly favorable.

The young people I've talked to agree. They want the right to vote, and they're per-

fectedly willing to assume adult responsibilities, too.

THE OBSERVERLAND suburbs had a major role in getting the Special Commission on the Age of Majority created.

News editor Tim Richard, a guy who habitually worries about the 21st century, began researching the idea in 1967.

On June 22, 1969, Observer Newspapers published a full-page "White Paper" arguing that people are maturing younger and that all our laws ought to be revised accordingly.

We gleaned research by U.S. Rep. Marvin Esch, a Republican; State Rep. Marvin Stempien, a Democrat; a psychiatrist at Northville State Hospital; barbers, housewives, teachers, liberals, conservatives. All thought the idea was

great. All had suggestions. All helped.

Gov. Milliken was in Plymouth when a staff member cornered him and lobbied for it. He listened to our ideas, then put his own staff to work on it. The result: A Special Commission on the Age of Majority—and stupid headlines about booze.

A SUGGESTION you hear is that the 18-year-olds be allowed to buy beer but not liquor. That's unnecessary. In the first place, the 18-20 age group sticks mainly to beer anyway, by choice. In the second place, the hard stuff's expensive for them.

But some guys in the under-21 group are able to afford the hard stuff. They've got the money. You see, they saved their combat pay.

LEAD-FREE OR NOT—THAT'S MIGHTY EXPENSIVE POLLUTION!



Dan McCosh writes

There's An Option For Flood Plains

The appeal of building underwater in river flood plains is probably a little mystifying to non-real estate people unfamiliar with the demand for acreage in a highly desirable location, regardless of condition.

It is only a matter of time before the cost of running a string of dump trucks into a site becomes a minor expense compared to the profits of "development" once the land is filled.

The trouble is, old man river don't know enough to respect a long-term lease, purchase agreement or zoning change.

THE RESULT is evident all along the route of the Rouge River from its mouth at Zug Island to the upper reaches in Southfield.

Crowded from the old lazy flats, swamps and low spots where it used to spread after a heavy spring rain, the river has a habit of erupting into basements, drowning front yards and washing out streets, and it's getting worse all the time, as concrete replaces topsoil over three counties.

It's a kind of weird irony that the development that makes the low spots and flood plains even more valuable as a way to absorb the runoff from our asphalt jungle also makes it economically sound to fill in this safety valve too, but that's the way it is.

IN SOUTHFIELD, several

local groups, and some of the council, have taken a strong stand in favor of "natural" flood controls, reasoning that the river knows best how to handle its ungentelemanly spring excesses, and all that is needed to prevent flooding is to leave well enough alone.

The official expression of this attitude is supposedly included in the "flood plain controls" ordinance, passed last year, which controls new building in the flood plains of the Rouge and its tributaries.

The ordinance is based heavily on engineering principles of water flow. Basically the idea is you can "trade" a hole in the ground for a pile of dirt, and keep the same water storage capacity in the flood plain.

The technique is called "cut and fill", and if it was liberally used, it could ultimately result in a very deep, very narrow river.

There is an alternate view of the flood plains, a view supported by council members Steven Hurite and Jean McDonnell, and ecologist Mary Ann Cooper: that "cut and fill" destroys a natural plain, and if all development is restricted, the "natural" way is best.

Unfortunately, this severe restriction on property in private hands amounts to confiscation, something the courts have been traditionally opposed to.

In fact one recent court decision in Redford Township actually upheld the right of a builder to build on his property even though the city submitted a picture of the building inspector in a rowboat over the site.

Without a major change in the courts' attitude towards restricting land use, the city will either have to accept the engineering mentality, which in many cases has ended in expensive covered drains being installed in areas formerly drained by small creeks, or take a strong stand in favor of the wilderness approach, which appears so idealistic it is doomed to failure.

Doomed unless the city is willing to buy all the land in the flood plains, or zone it so strictly nothing but a golf course can be built on the land.

Whether the city pays for more parks and wild land, or concrete pipes and Army Engineer projects like the one in Dearborn Heights, the public will pay. This is only right, since the water that floods the river runs off everybody's roof.

You takes your choice, then you pays your money.

Tim Richard writes

Gas Taxes Are Unbelievable

Last weekend one could easily find lead-free gasoline for 23.9 cents per gallon.

One cent of that was sales tax. Seven cents was the state gasoline tax, and four cents went for the federal gas tax. Total taxes amounted to 12 cents, which meant that the raw gas price was only 11.9 cents. Thus, gasoline was being taxed at more than 100 per cent!

Michigan drivers have put up with this heavy and regressive tax because it went directly into something that benefited them—roads. Not welfare or farm subsidies regulation. Roads.

LAST WEEK Gov. Milliken proposed that the Legislature raise the state gasoline tax by 1.3 cents per gallon. He made a neat something-for-everyone package out of it—0.4 for out-state freeways, 0.4 for city and county roads, and 0.5 for urban mass transit.

("Urban," incidentally, doesn't mean just Detroit. It means us in Oakland and western Wayne counties. "Urban" means us and the people who work in the growing number of industries and offices out here.)

Predictably, the road lobby, most notably the auto

manufacturers, reacted negatively to that half-cent for urban mass transit.

What, then, is the justification for taxing gasoline to help raise \$20 million a year for urban mass transit?

STATE SEN. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth), a champion of mass transit who reflects the governor's views, put it this way:

"First, mass transit will improve the urban transportation system by easing the congestion problem. We've got lots of two-car families, and we're talking three cars per family now.

"Our freeways were designed for 'interstate' travel, but they're used pretty much as local roads right now. We've got to ease the burden on them.

"Second, we need a balanced transportation system. We can build only so many roads. Right now, 68 per cent of downtown Detroit is tied up in freeways, streets and parking lots.

"Under the governor's proposal, the present Highway Commission would become a four-man commission to reflect

all types of transportation—roads, aviation, mass transit and ports. The Highway Department would become a Department of Transportation and Highways with four divisions," says Pursell.

IN SCIENTIFIC jargon, the governor is taking a "systems" approach to transportation, not just building roads and rails. But why finance it with the gasoline tax? Why not a more general tax?

"We've got some other priorities for the income tax, like education and mental health," says the local senator.

Well, that's the argument. Personally, I'm not convinced that a gasoline tax hike is the only way to raise the money, but it's pretty clear that the money must be raised somehow.

Michigan led the 50 states in jumping into the interstate highway program, but Pursell points out that places like Houston and Boston are well ahead of us in getting those \$3 federal funds for every \$1 in local-state funds for mass transit.

The governor has his work cut out for him.

R.T. Thompson writes

Big Cheer For Stevenson Cagers

Michigan's annual high school basketball hysteria reaches its first highspot Thursday when the eight surviving teams in each of four divisions battle in the quarterfinals.

And for the first time in more years than Livonia coaches want to remember, the fever has struck and struck with tremendous impact at Stevenson High.

We doff our hats to the courageous Spartans and their Coach George Van Wagoner for the spectacular manner in which they climbed from a losing regular season record into a tournament giant.

DURING THE SEASON Observerland had several quintets that made Stevenson say "Uncle" on more than one oc-

casian but when the chips were down it was the Spartans who rose to the heights time after time and now are one of eight class A teams remaining in play.

Who would have thought that Stevenson would persevere in the district championship game against a Bentley team that had lost only twice and had whipped the Spartans twice...but the third time was a charm for Stevenson.

The Spartans were underdogs in the regional final against powerful Garden City East. The Panthers were heavy favorites to advance to the quarterfinals for the second time in four years...but once again Stevenson proved the best tournament team.

The big test is still ahead and the Spartans will need the

help of every rooter, every bit of knowledge Coach Van Wagoner has and perhaps a bit of assistance from the man above in Thursday's game against unbeaten Pontiac Central...everyone's choice to win the championship.

Regardless of how things fare from this point on, every member of the Stevenson squad and the coaching staff deserve a big hand for a job well done. The student body deserves praise for the manner it has backed the team all through the season and in tournament play.

Let the record stand that this Stevenson team has gone farther than any other in the school's history and has been a "Cinderella" all the way. Maybe now will be the time to grab the golden slipper.

Editorial & Opinion

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