

OBSERVATION POINT

At-Large Board Would Serve College Kids Best

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

During the past 10 years, community colleges have become a vital part of Michigan's educational scene. This has been particularly true here in the suburbs, where Schoolcraft College and Oakland Community College have experienced enormous growth and development.

Only recently, the State Legislature made it quite clear that an enrollment freeze was to be placed on the state's big three universities (Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne), with the bulk of the growth to come from

smaller institutions (Eastern Michigan, in this area, for example) and community colleges.

What this means is that the past growth of local community colleges may be only a small sample of what's to come.

That, in turn, makes a decision being thrashed out right now in Lansing vitally important for everyone living in this area. It has to do with how boards of trustees for community colleges shall be elected.

BASICALLY, there are two ways of picking boards for community colleges which serve a specific geographical area:

(1) At large, in which all voters in the district vote for trustee candidates, who then represent the entire district, much in the way a congressman represents his entire congressional district; (2) single-member districts, in which trustees are elected by voters living in individual communities within the overall community college district, much in the way voters in a city elect a city councilman who then represents his ward on the council.

At present, trustees for Oakland Community College, which has its Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Township, are elected at-large throughout Oakland County. Schoolcraft College trustees, on the other hand, are elected partly at-large and partly from individual communities (Plymouth, Livonia, Garden City, Northville and Clarencville) within the Schoolcraft College District.

The reasons Schoolcraft is set up the way it is are historical: The

college district resulted from the confederation of five local school districts. Also, it was felt that having single community representation on the board would prevent having one big city (Livonia) dominate the others when the site for the campus was being selected.

All this has been upset by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that elected officials must serve districts of equal population, "one man, one vote." Obviously, the Schoolcraft board—with single member districts representing single school districts in the Schoolcraft College District—was in violation of that rule.

NOW THE STATE Legislature is considering how to resolve the problem. Two bills have been reported out of committee, one setting up the Schoolcraft board as single-member district representation, the other organizing at-large elections.

Basically, the argument for single-member board representatives is that they represent their own community or school district, and so are concerned with protecting the interests of their own voters—i.e., people in Livonia, Plymouth, Garden City, etc. In particular, a single-district representation bill would prevent a situation in which all trustee candidates might run at-large and the election might be dominated by Livonia voters, since Livonia has the largest population of any school district in the area.

The at-large approach has the major advantage that it would tend to help people living in the

district to think in terms of the entire district, rather than of their own parochial interests.

Schoolcraft College is a great source of education and culture to this entire area, and clearly it is not designed to serve the parochial interests of Livonia or Plymouth Township at the expense of other units within the district.

TWO OTHER points favor the at-large approach:

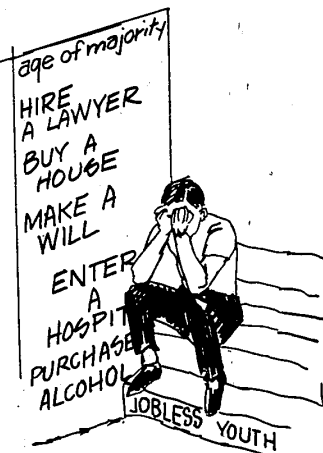
(1) If the single-member route is chosen, a special census would be required to apportion by single-member districts in a way cleaving to the "one-man, one-vote" rule which led to the problem in the first place. This would be expensive.

(2) Single-member trustee districts, even after special apportionment, would not always follow the boundaries of the school district in the Schoolcraft District. This means that trustees would not be able to represent one community on the board. In addition, candidates from Plymouth and Northville have already demonstrated an ability to win in past elections, in such a way as to argue against one city's ever being able to dominate the board.

So, on balance, the at-large board makes the most sense for Oakland Community College, which would have to change entirely its present election procedures if the single-member district were to be adopted.

After all, community colleges serve kids. And in doing this, it doesn't make much difference from what city or school district the kids come.

NO PAY, NO PLAY.



Tim Richard writes

A Glass Of Beer For Responsibility

This observer has talked to dozens of persons of all ages, of all degrees of liberality and conservatism, of all levels of schooling, and has yet to find anyone opposed to giving the 18-20 age group (a) more rights and (b) more responsibilities.

Without a peep of dissent, the Republican State Convention in February approved dropping the age of majority to 18, and Democratic conventions have given overwhelming approval to proposals aimed at giving more political rights to the younger folks.

So it was something of a surprise to see Observerland representatives give only lukewarm 4-3 approval last week to the age of majority bill as it sailed through the State House of Representatives 73-30.

THE BIG objection appeared to be beverage alcohol.

Reps. Ray Baker (R-Farmington), whose district includes Lathrup Village and western

Southfield, and James Tierney (D-Garden City), whose district includes northwestern Westland and the Plymouth community, were opposed to the bill. That wasn't surprising.

What was a surprise was the negative vote of Richard Young (D-Dearborn Heights), whose district covers northeastern Westland and a bit of southern Livonia. He said school officials were opposed to allowing the 18-20 year olds to quaff.

Rep. John Bennett (D-Redford) had a foot in both camps. On the one hand, he can tell the old blue-nosers he voted against allowing the 18-20 group to purchase alcohol. But then he will be able to go to those young people and tell them he voted for the total bill on final passage.

One hates to accuse a veteran public official of insincerity, duplicity or political expediency. Yet Bennett's votes indicate he favors allowing a young person to buy a \$25,000 house but is against letting him buy a 25 cent glass of beer. So let us say his reasoning powers are soft.

Heroes of the day are Reps. Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park), whose district includes part of Southfield, Marvin Stempin (D-Livonia), and Thomas Brown (D-Westland). They voted for placing the age of majority at 18 and were consistent.

But may a triple bolt of lightning strike the demented headline writer on the Detroit News who—on a story concerned with making contracts, owning real estate, making wills, starting court proceedings, committing oneself to a hospital, purchasing alcohol and so on and so forth—wrote: "House OK's bill to allow drinking by 18-year-olds."

THE BILL goes next to the State Senate, and let us hope that the upper house will read the words of Gov. Milliken's Special Commission on the Age of Majority:

"The fact is that the 18, 19 and 20-year-old has already entered an adult social and employment world, and he will drink if he wants to whether it is legal or not."

"At least 12 of our sister states and the District of Columbia allow those under 21 to drink some form of alcoholic beverage. Experience in those states indicates 18 through 20-year-olds CAN handle alcohol."

"No state that has lowered the drinking age has raised it again to 21."

The Judge Did Use Restraint

We are pleased to learn that Circuit Judge Roland Olzak, who handled the Schoolcraft College reapportionment case, has exercised proper judicial restraint and is trying hard to avoid getting into the lawmaking business.

In an April 21 editorial headlined "Judge Turns Legislator," we were critical of the judge for issuing a writ of mandamus ordering the Schoolcraft trustees to draft a constitutional reapportionment plan for his approval.

THE EDITORIAL was written some days before judge Olzak actually issued his order, so we had no way of knowing that he would phrase it this way:

"The orders of this court shall determine the method of election of trustees of the board of the Northwest Wayne County Community College District, pending appropriate remedial legislation amending Sec. 34 of Act 331... by the Legislature for the State of Michigan."

Clearly, Judge Olzak prefers that the Legislature handle community college reapportionment problems. But if it fails to do so, then he will step in.

We are indebted to three attorneys in the case—Edward Draugelis for Schoolcraft College, William Sempliner, for the Plymouth school board and Roger Craig for the New Democratic Coalition of Livonia—for making a copy of the court order available and pointing out Judge Olzak's restraint.

We are delighted to agree with the attorneys that the judge has acted responsibly. Our concerns have been satisfied, our criticism is happily withdrawn, and we are only sorry we couldn't have seen a copy of the court order sooner.

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R.T. Thompson writes

Gambling's No Answer

Is Michigan destined to become the Nevada of the Midwest? Will Detroit or one of the large adjoining suburbs turn into Las Vegas or a Reno?

These questions should be on the minds of all residents of the state judging from the number of gambling bills that have cropped up in the State Legislature during the past few weeks.

Dog racing, lottery, off-track betting, additional harness racing, additional dates for the runner and trotters and the possibility that bingo games will be legalized—these are just a few of the suggestions lawmakers have dumped into the hopper.

That brings up a logical question: Is legalized gambling the

only way legislators have for boosting the state treasury?

THE OFF-TRACK betting bill, proposed a year ago by Rep. George Montgomery but which died in committee, is very much alive this year. It has come out of committee, and those close to the picture in Lansing believe it has better than an even chance of passing.

Back of the move is the history of off-track betting in New York State which started in Jan. 1 and has been very successful thus far.

Of course, there is quite a difference in the betting habits of New Yorkers and those in Michigan. New York tracks think nothing of \$3 and \$4 million daily handles. The per capita wagering there is something like \$100 while in metropolitan Detroit it is less than \$75.

Be that as it may, we expressed our opposition to off-track betting a year ago, and our opinion hasn't changed.

It could evolve into nothing more than legalized bookie joints, which it has in such spots as Toronto and New York City for that matter.

DOG RACING has been before the Legislature since the time of the slaying of Sen. Warren Hooper as a direct result of dog racing interests.

There may be some grounds for establishing dog tracks in the summer resort areas, but the thought of adding dog racing to the winter sports scene in the metropolitan Detroit area isn't that appetizing.

Just imagine, horse racing in the afternoon, dog and harness racing at night and then the opportunity to drop into an off-

track establishment any time during the afternoon or evening to make a wager on races anywhere in the United States.

CERTAINLY, lobbyists for the various types of gambling can produce figures to show how much the state would realize in taxes from gambling, but it is our feeling that many of the figures are figments of imagination and never would be reached.

The failure of lotteries in New York and in the New England states should give legislators something to think about. Backers of the lotteries sold lawmakers in the two areas on the huge amounts that would be raised. It hasn't come true in either area.

There is talk that bingo will be legalized again. But once more, it appears as if the legislators have lost sight of the church groups throughout the state which were instrumental in banning such games several years ago in a statewide election. We don't think they are going to change their minds now.

Supporters of the dog tracks, off-track betting etc. point to the boost to employment, pointing out that each program would make jobs for thousands.

And that appears to be a strange angle inasmuch as there are factions in the City of Livonia that would like to have the race track eliminated and replaced by an industrial park. Closing the track would put about 1,000 persons out of jobs.

Legalized gambling isn't the answer to the state problems. There must be other ways of balancing the budget, and it's high time the legislators started looking for them. We don't need a midwest Nevada in Michigan.

Editorial & Opinion

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