

POINTS OF VIEW

John Engler, please come home again

The MEGA debate is no longer on the merits of a state tax plan but the inconsistency of Gov. John Engler. As a legislator and first-time gubernatorial candidate, Engler used to say, "Government shouldn't be picking winners and losers." Now, with the Michigan Economic Growth Authority, he proposes giving tax credits to companies that increase employment here.

The situation is best summed up in this bit of doggerel, designed to be sung to the tune of "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home":

Won't you come home, John Engler?
Won't you come home?
Liberals got hold of you
MEGA picks business winners,
All others lose,
No more free market for you,
Mackinac Center's angry,
Detroit News, too,
Since from your principles you roam,
There's laissez-faire gloom

At Adam Smith's tomb,
John Engler, won't you please come home!

The state Senate rejected the MEGA bill; the House passed it once, but approved a different version Tuesday.

The issue is as old as the American republic. Alexander Hamilton, President Washington's treasury secretary and economic guru, wanted to make the fledgling nation an industrial power. All the states' debts would be assumed and paid off, 100 cents on the dollar, by the federal government — to give investors confidence. A national bank would oversee a system of credit and money — mobilizing capital.

Tariffs on imports would protect "infant industries," not to mention finance the federal government. Raw materials wouldn't be exported. Government would inspect domestic man-



TIM RICHARD

ufactured goods to prevent fraud and ensure quality. Roads and canals would move commerce. Inventors and their brainchildren would be protected. Bounties and high wages would be paid to skilled tradesmen who immigrated from Europe.

Hamilton's policy of promoting industry was emulated by Republican Gov. William Milliken. Democratic

Gov. James Blanchard, Engler's predecessor, carbon-copied 99 percent of the Milliken agenda.

As a campaigner, Engler paid homage to the ideas of Scottish economist Adam Smith, who promoted non-interference ("laissez-faire") in his landmark work, "The Wealth of Nations," in 1776. Hamilton specifically denounced the work.

Smith ripped apart the mercantile system of King George III: confining manufacturing to the mother country, limiting the colonies to furnishing raw materials, requiring all transportation by British ships, forbidding trade between the colonies and other nations.

Smith favored the "division and specialization of labor" and free trade, guided by "the invisible hand" of consumer demand. Said Engler: Cut taxes and get big government out of the way.

In the 1995 version of this 219-year-old debate, the central element is not

what's right or wrong but how Engler abandoned the principles on which he campaigned and embraced a different point of view — after the election.

It's getting to be a habit. In 1990 Engler never campaigned on the notion of abolishing the General Assistance welfare program; but he did it after the election. Through the 1980s until 1994, he supported school reform legislation and tough state standards. This year he wants to rip up the School Code, toss out the tests, junk teacher accreditation standards and trust that local school boards will lead us in the paths of Plato and Aristotle. Now there is his MEGA plan.

As a national role beckons Engler, one is forced to wonder: What principles will he abandon next?

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

LETTERS

Support SMART

One of the most divisive issues faced by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners in 1995 has been how to provide reliable mass transportation to those who need it.

I understand that the majority of those who depend on the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) often have no other means of transportation. Many are handicapped or elderly and cannot drive. Others are younger, often students who aren't legally entitled to have a driver's license.

That's why I support a reliable mass transportation system for the tri-county area. It is important to remember, as I have said before, that we cannot disenfranchise the disadvantaged by snatching away their primary form of mobility.

In my support of continued SMART-provided mass transit services, I am also mindful that some of the cost of providing that service falls on those who don't use the service. In other words, the service is subsidized by the taxpayers.

Taxpayer support for public services is the norm. It is nothing unusual. Taxpayers have generously supported libraries they don't use, museums they don't patronize and parks they don't visit. They recognize that parks and libraries contribute to the high quality of life in Oakland County.

It is no different with mass transportation. It would be unconscionable to offer mass transportation to those on a fixed income and then price it beyond their means.

The difficulty is in balancing the benefits and the burdens equitably. When we ask taxpayers to shoulder much of the financial responsibility, there is the possibility that they may say no. That is the difference between a request and a demand.

Although I strongly support the SMART mass transit service, I am equally supportive of allowing the voters to make the final decision.

At the last meeting of the Board of Commissioners, many of those who rely on the SMART system made it clear to us just how important the service is to them. Their message was not lost on the commission.

I am convinced the Oakland County Board of Commissioners is up to the task of putting the wheels in motion to resolve this dilemma. We commissioners can clear the way to ensure that bus service is uninterrupted, but it is up to the voters to decide how long that service will be provided.

That, in my opinion, is what representative government is all about. When we want to know the will of the people on important issues, the simplest method of finding out is to ask. Their vote will constitute their answer.

John McCulloch, R-Royal Oak, Oakland County Commissioner

Hope for the world

Y our eyes burn as you stare into the computer monitor. It's been five hours straight crashing for tomorrow's presentation.

It's ready — the logic, the flow, the charts — color coordinated and everything. You'll knock them dead when they see this. So why the empty void you feel inside?

You stop to reflect a moment. Maybe you're just exhausted. It's been weeks getting this ready. Your presentation is fine, but somehow you still feel wanting.

Today we are overwhelmed as we create and process ever more information. We continually try to increase our control over our data, our environment, and even our destiny. Our lives have become immersed in a culture that lures us away from truth and morals.

We plug into an electronic world of violence, disgracefulness, selfishness, hedonism, and greed. Corporations seek profits, and politics is a shameless struggle for control among rival interests.

We find liberalism short on morals, and conservatism long on hardship. We confuse consensus with truth, and engage in moral improvisation.

Constant and complex change make us weary and uneasy. In settling old problems, we create new ones. Once viewed as orderly, our world is becoming chaotic. It seems life changes without end, but doesn't progress toward anything.

Technology always seems to be on

the verge of setting us free. Yet it never does. Instead we find emptiness. We see ourselves lost to forces beyond our control.

So what are we doing? Where are we going? It seems our notion of progress is not able to make us happy. We need more, something beyond logic and material gain. We need a greater awareness and understanding in our lives.

Gradually we come to realize there exists a powerful, loving being that nurtures our lives. When we feel empty and meaningless, we should remember that we are at the center of God's concern.

We are not lost. For he satisfies the thirsty soul, and fills the hungry soul with good (Psalm 107:9).

We find that the Lord fills our empty void. This world is here to ready us to be with him. Though we may falter along the way, by his grace we know he welcomes us. Jesus said "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:15). As it was millennia ago, and as it will millennia from now, his grace provides hope for our changing world.

Jeff Lukens, Farmington Hills

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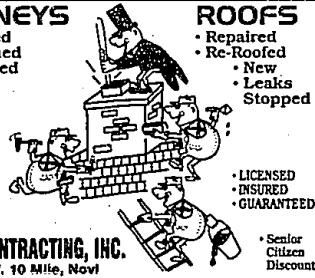
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