

County Reform: Pursell Vs The Bureaucrats

By TIM RICHARD

"Every bureaucrat in 83 counties must have been there. I never saw a hearing like it in my life," said State Sen. Carl Pursell, author of a bill that would allow counties to elect or appoint a chief executive.

Pursell (R-Plymouth), himself a former Wayne County commissioner, says prospects for his bill are "difficult" at best. "His bill and a companion House bill drew the ire of what Pursell calls the 'courthouse gang' at a joint House-Senate hearing last week in Lansing. 'I walked in there to testify and the place was packed. There must have been 700 to 1,000 people there, and 90 percent of the opponents were paid officials and county staff people.'"

In favor of Pursell's bill, he said, were many county commissioners (including Wayne Chairman Robert FitzPatrick), interested citizens and chamber of commerce types — "people not directly interested in county budgets."



CARL PURSELL

PURSELL FRANKLY calls county government "100 years behind the times" and wants to see some reform.

"My bill (SB 1036) is not a county home rule charter bill," as indicated by an eight-column Detroit News headline, he said. "It does nothing to increase or change the taxing power of counties. It doesn't usurp any powers from cities."

"My bill is permissive enabling legislation to allow county boards of commissioners to either appoint a county manager or let the people elect a county executive who, like a mayor, would have the power of veto."

"It's a constructive, practical alternative to county home rule — which, by the way, has not been adopted in any major or minor county. 'People are demanding responsive government. If they have a problem, they want to know who to call.'"

UNDER PURSELL's bill, the "constitutional" county officers would continue to be elected — the prosecutor, clerk, sheriff and treasurer. But the county manager or executive could appoint all department heads — such as public works, public health, parks, transportation, finance and public safety — and thus exercise financial and administrative leadership.

Abolished would be such institutions as the board of auditors, the road commission and the drain commission. The latter two would be lumped into a public works department.

"I got hit by all 83 sheriffs," said Pursell. They apparently took his "public safety" function to mean that they would lose their jurisdictions. Pursell thinks that part of the bill may have to be amended now.

But he adds that the sheriff should "develop a broad criminal justice program and

not just be a keeper of the jail."

HIS OPPONENTS "consider themselves professionals. Well, we need their expertise, but we don't need autonomous and independent policy-making groups."

County office-holders made much of the fact that they were elected, but Pursell pointed out that many actually got their starts through appointment — Sheriff (now Detroit Mayor) Roman Gibbis, Sheriff William Lucas, Clerk J.B. Sullivan, Auditor (now Secretary of State) Richard Austin.

Pursell also argues that county commissioners ought to be policy-makers, which is why he wants to give their powers to make department appointments to the county manager or executive.

IF HIS BILL is ever approved, he said, it would be a second landmark in county legislation, the first being the court decisions and laws which provided for smaller, "one-man, one-vote" county boards.

"The old board of supervisors met at the noon hour, went through a three-page agenda in 20 minutes, had a drink, went back to their cities and townships, and delegated powers to these autonomous commissions," Pursell said. The result is that county boards can't make policy the way they should, he said, and bureaucrats are reluctant to give up their powers — as Pursell found out the hard way in Lansing last week.

Out-state legislators, in particular, are fearful both of delegating more powers to local government and trading on the toes of county officials who might just decide to challenge them in the next primary, as Pursell sees it.

Deadline For Photos Is Near

Saturday (Oct. 23) at 5 p.m. is the deadline to enter the Livonia Mall's fourth annual snapshot contest. Entries should be taken to the mall office near the G entrance. Entries will be exhibited Oct. 25 to 31.

THERE are four categories: (1) human interest, (2) humor, (3) nature and scenic and (4) color prints. Prizes in each category are worth \$50, \$35 and \$10, and best of show will win \$75.

The contest rules: It's open to club members and individuals. Entrants need not have done their own photofinishing. Entries should be eight by 10 inches or larger and mounted on poster board.

Entries should have a label with the photographer's and club's name and address and the classification entered.

Negatives may not be retouched, and no artwork or multiple prints are permitted. It is preferred that entries not have been prizewinners in other competitions.

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Old Homestead Studies Paving

FARMINGTON A meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 26, at 8 p.m. in Farmington Township Hall to discuss road improvements for Old Homestead subdivision.

Representatives from the Oakland County Road Commission will be present to give information on the improvements, proposed financing and estimated costs, says Supervisor Earl Teeples. A few months ago, Teeples outlined areas in need of immediate improvement along with a schedule of obsolescence that could be expected in the township.

McDonald Is Granted A Divorce

U.S. Rep. Jack McDonald (R-Farmington) was granted a divorce from his wife of 18 years and given custody of the couple's two sons, Michael, 16 and David, 11.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Farrell E. Roberts granted the uncontested divorce in April charging "extreme and repeated cruelty" and Mrs. McDonald filed a counter-complaint charging "extreme cruelty."

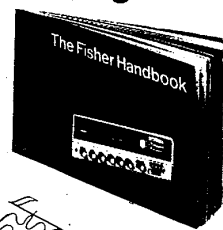
Mrs. McDonald was given their Farmington apartment, visitation rights, alimony of \$125 weekly and furnishings from their home in Great Falls, Va.

McDonald was granted the Virginia home subject to the payment of \$10,000 to his wife. He also was ordered to pay his wife's attorney fee of \$750. McDonald, whose 19th District includes Livonia, Redford Township and Farmington, was formerly Wayne County board chairman and supervisor of Redford Township.

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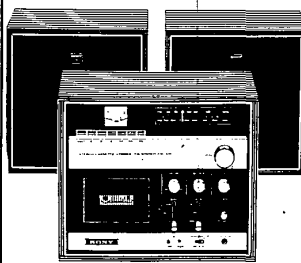
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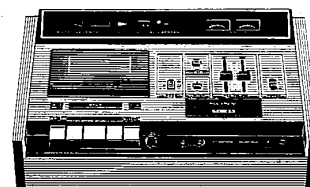
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