



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Legislature's Inaction Lies At Heart Of Bussing Issue

Yesterday the State Legislature reconvened for the fall session. That means that Lansing will be filled with exhalations of hot air and the clanking sounds of political deals being cut until around Dec. 15 - minus, of course, the week everybody takes off for deer season.

This year, the deer may be safer than the hides of some legislators, who have struggled through the past 10 months in what most observers judge to be an unproductive and frustrating session.

Remaining on the lawmakers' agenda is a whole slew of unresolved issues.

Heading the list is the matter of school bussing. Last week Rep. Alex Pilch (D-Dearborn) said he would introduce a resolution urging the State Board of Education to appeal Federal Judge Stephen J. Roth's integration decision, and House Speaker William Ryan (D-Detroit) thinks the bussing issue alone could consume three to five weeks.

ALSO ON THE docket of interest to the suburbs are:

• Tax measures (including a possible tax on motels and hotels in Detroit and Oakland County) to finance a new stadium, either in Detroit or near Pontiac -- or possibly both.

• Mass transit between Detroit and the suburbs is needed, but it's up in the air what the legislature will do with Gov. William Milliken's proposed 1.3 cent gasoline tax hike to pay the bill.

• There are 270,000 snowmobiles in the state, many of them living in this area. The Legislature has to pass some kind of registration, noise, safety and operations rules.

• Most pressing is some kind of resolution of how education in Michigan is to be financed. Proposals to cut the property tax and replace it with an increased, possibly graduated, income tax are stalled; until this matter is settled, no school district in this area has much of a chance to pass any millages.

PART OF THE reason the legislative backlog is so staggering is that the mechanisms of getting agreement in Lansing are pretty clumsy and outmoded.

Lt. Gov. James Brickley was in Farmington over the weekend and spoke to that point. "The legislative branch was designed to be clumsy," he observed, "but it has more power than the governor and the court put together."

"Sluggishness is built into the system," Brickley added. "So many legislators, working

through committees, each with a political career to protect -- the process is intended to be slow."

Brickley came up with two ideas to improve the Legislature's performance: Keep the two house Legislature, perhaps with a reduced number of seats, to expedite legislation; restrict the time in which the Legislature could act, to force prompt consideration of problems.

CLEARLY, Brickley wasn't ready with specific proposals on the problem of how to reform the institution of the Legislature to make it more responsive to the people's needs. But at least he was aware that a problem exists.

To show just how legislative inaction can lead to real problems, consider the school bussing crisis.

The Legislature has known for years that the property tax is an unfair and outmoded means of financing education. Further, it has recognized that it treats education unequally across various school districts, leading to unequal education for kids.

But the Legislature shilly-shallied all this year on how to clean up the problem.

Then Judge Roth dropped his bombshell, saying in effect that education was unequal for kids in the state and that one way to make it equal was to bus kids across districts.

I'm not sure if the Legislature had cleared up the problem of school financing that Judge Roth wouldn't have ruled the way he did. But the Legislature's failure to act certainly added to the pressure for Roth to make the ruling he did.

I'M INCLINED to believe that one of the big political issues of the next 20 years will be how to retain our democratic system of government but simultaneously make it more effective in solving problems, more responsive to the real needs of the people, and more prompt in facing hard choices and making needed decisions.

Perhaps the Legislature ought to put the reform of its own procedures on top of its agenda for this year. The matter's important, as anyone concerned about bussing recognizes, and if the Legislature started thinking about the problem right now we might even get some kind of action within the decade.

IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU STARK RAVING MAD!



R.T. Thompson writes

Let The Drivers Know

The State Highway Department may be doing a great job of improving traffic flow in the future with the Schoolcraft Road freeway which will probably be completed by the spring of 1973.

But it isn't doing a thing to improve traffic conditions at the present time. It appears there is a total lack of communication between those in charge of work on the freeway, which is quite a mess at the present time, and the motoring public.

IN THE FIRST place, there is the closing of Stark Road to cars from Schoolcraft. Nowhere along Schoolcraft is there a sign indicating that Stark is closed. Thus, hundreds of drivers turn west on Schoolcraft from Farmington Road to go down Stark, turn left at the crossover and then are greeted with a huge barrier.

In fact, there are signs along

Schoolcraft between Farmington and Stark stating that this is the route for the Farmington detour. To our knowledge, Farmington Road has been open to north and southbound traffic for the past three or four weeks.

Those entering Stark from Plymouth Road are warned that the street is closed, but they can enter and then drive all the way to Schoolcraft before running into the barrier.

It appears to us that the Highway Department could give newspapers in the area notification of the changes and the detours so that the motoring public may be made aware of detours, closed streets, etc.

NOW THERE IS a new, dangerous bottleneck at Schoolcraft and Inkster Roads. After swinging around the newest route changes going east, the highway widens to three lanes at Inkster.

That's fine...except the highway narrows to two lanes once one gets across Inkster. This has caused many near-accidents in late evening when cars are leaving the Detroit Race Course and when workers head home from the large industrial plants in Livonia.

Night after night recently, there have been near-accidents as cars in the outside or third lane suddenly find the way blocked after they have started forward.

There isn't a sign anywhere indicating that the road narrows from three to two lanes. Probably one will be erected after three or four accidents.

It's about time the Highway Department awakens to the fact that putting in a new highway isn't just a matter of construction...it's high time it gives motorists some idea of what the plans are so that they'll have some notice of changes.

Tim Richard writes

A Few Cool Heads Get Credit

It's fashionable to panic in suburbia over the prospect that a federal court will order cross-district bussing with Detroit to achieve racial balance.

And so it is a pleasure to note that some suburban officials are keeping cool heads, and they should be given public credit for it.

THE FARMINGTON City Council quietly placed on file a wild-eyed anti-bussing resolution sent by the Farmington Township Board, which passed it the week before.

Councilman John Allen seemed to speak for that city when he said: "I am not in favor of bussing but think that this subject is far too big to be made a political fight."

He is right. City government has no business jumping into a school issue like that. The

Farmington City Council showed mature restraint.

IN GARDEN CITY, the school board has a tough situation because that community -- a little older, more settled and smaller, than most Observerland suburbs -- had one of the strongest reactions against Judge Roth's decision in the Detroit case.

The board and superintendent in Garden City, however, didn't wait for frightened people and glory seekers to organize public meetings on the bussing issue.

They showed some initiative and organized their own meetings first. The hysteria in Garden City might have been far worse if school officials hadn't made such an effort to talk to the people and calm them down.

It's too bad that more cities and townships didn't show the

restraint of the Farmington City Council and more school leaders didn't organize their own meetings before NAG chapters got started.

IT ALSO APPEARS that the boycott of schools, which some groups had been calling for Oct. 25, was a dismal flop.

Not all the figures are in at this writing, but it appears that only rarely were absenteeism rates up by more than a few percentage points. And it's possible that even these figures are misleading because Monday and the three prior days have been so dismal that more kids than usual have colds.

Whatever decision is finally reached on bussing, it's quite clear that it will be made in the courtrooms and the halls of Congress and the Legislatures. It won't be made by boycotts and flamboyant resolutions.

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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