

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Property Tax Solution
Leads To Other Problems

Some sage once observed that you never solve one problem without two others cropping up to take its place.

Such is the case with the three major problems facing us in the suburbs today: local property tax financing for schools; "open suburbs," meaning not only to what degree black people but also poor people can live in the suburbs; and cross-district bussing of school children.

The property tax issue seems on the way to being settled. Gradually the argument that the property tax is unfair, inequitable, and outdated is gaining ground. Recently a court in California ruled that the property tax is unconstitutional because it is inequitable, and a similar case is pending here in Michigan.

Governor Milliken and some Democrats have finally agreed to work to cut the property tax and substitute it with some kind of income tax as the base for school financing, and a petition drive to this end has been started.

Although it may take time, it's safe to say that the days of dependence on the property tax are numbered.

CONSIDER, however, the implications of this step for another less discussed but equally important matter, "open suburbs."

In the past few years, the drive to escape the big cities has spread beyond the middle class to blacks, blue collar workers and the poor. Their reasons for wanting out are the same as led many of us to the suburbs in the first place: fear of crime; deteriorating property values; need for good schools; desire for peace, quiet and the good life.

Many suburban communities, however, have erected towering barriers against this movement. Some zoning rules require large lots, single family residences, expensive construction, materials, sidewalks and sewers. All these are designed to make a community more attractive, but they also have the effect of raising the price of a home in such communities far above the reach of most poor or blue collar or black people.

A recent article in Newsweek Magazine called the problem of the open suburb, "The major domestic social and political battle of the decade ahead." Although I might not agree with Newsweek's rhetoric, it's clear that the problem is pretty important.

IT'S ALSO closely related to the reduction of the property tax. Here's how.

Most responsible officials here in the suburbs argue that even a modest influx of low

income families places an intolerable strain on already over-stretched budgets and local services.

Economists have proved that even federally-subsidized low-cost housing rarely pays its way in suburbia. 1) It fails to enlarge the property tax base per capita in the same way as a single family house. 2) Since low cost housing is usually inhabited by families who have more children than the norm, it requires more public expense for schools. 3) Because there seems to be some relationship between high density housing and crime, welfare and pollution, such housing will lead to a disproportionate demand for increased government services and thus expenditures.

Given these facts, and given the fact that the local property tax constitutes the main source for city and school financing, many people have constructed economically valid arguments against allowing low income families to live in suburban communities.

BUT CONSIDER what happens if the property tax is eliminated or cut to a low, flat rate statewide, and is replaced by an income tax.

Suburban financing, instead of being on a community-by-community basis, will be lumped over a region or over the entire state. And if that's the case, the increased strain on finances brought about by low income families moving to the suburbs will be borne not by a single community but by a pool of wider tax revenue.

In that event, the economic argument against low income families moving to the suburbs is damaged, and the whole argument is thrown back to a much more emotional level.

FROM THIS it's easy to see the relationship between reduction of the property tax and the other big suburban issue, cross district bussing.

One good argument against bussing is that it places an unfair economic strain on those

communities into which children are bussed.

But if education is to be financed by statewide income and property taxes, the general pool of resources so generated can easily be spread around to pay for the added burden bussed children put on a local school district.

ALL THIS sounds pretty bleak.

Here we thought we were on the brink of solving one of our biggest problems in the property tax, only to find that the solution creates even bigger problems ahead.

But if they are there, it's better to become aware of them now, so that they can be faced in time rather than come as a surprise.

And further, my guess is that like all problems we foresee in the future, the problems of open suburbs and bussing will take many unpredictable twists and turns before they are finally resolved.



Tim Richard writes

Board Needs Strong Stand

Failing to place their candidates on the Schoolcraft College board of trustees, the Faculty Forum, which represents a majority segment of the teaching staff, and the Student Senate, elected representatives of the student body, are taking a new line of attack to get seats at the table with the trustees at all regular meetings.

The two groups plan to make a formal request of the board at its Wednesday meeting (tonight) for seats at the conference table to serve in an advisory capacity.

These same groups, for the first time since the college started operations 10 years ago, endorsed slates of candidates for the board at the recent election.

As it turned out on election day, the voters ignored the endorsements and closely followed recommendations of the Observer Newspapers. These recommendations came only after members of the Observer staff personally interviewed all of the candidates and attended meetings at which practically all appeared and gave their views on the Schoolcraft College situation.

Those receiving endorsements of the Observer Newspapers were entirely different from those supported by the two groups with one or two exceptions.

THUS, it may be that the

Faculty Forum and the Student Senate feel it is necessary to have seats at the conference table at meetings . . . otherwise they wouldn't be trying to pressure through such an action.

Why do we bring up this matter? For the simple reason that we don't believe the Forum or the Student Senate should be seated with the board.

The trustees are elected by voters from the five districts that make up the college supporters. They come from Livonia, Plymouth, Garden City, Clarenceville and Northville. They have been selected to handle affairs for the five communities.

Perhaps the big reason we object to the proposals of the Forum and Senate is that each has had an opportunity since the first day the college opened to offer advice at the board meetings.

Each has had a seat, just

beyond the conference table, for representatives and each generally has had a person in attendance. In practically every instance where a matter came up that involved the students or the faculty, that representative was asked by the board chairman to express views.

WE FAIL to see the value of placing two more at the conference table, even though only as advisors. The opportunity has been presented in the past and will be presented at all future meetings; for the Forum and Student Senate members to speak their piece.

If they didn't agree with the board, they were allowed to state their reasons for opposing.

If they have had the opportunity while seated just off the conference table, what is to be gained by placing two more persons along with the trustees and administrators?

Leonard Poger writes

Bussing Has Strange Riders

School busses carry students from their homes to a public school and back again at the end of the day.

But with the cross-district bussing controversy riding through the metropolitan Detroit area, there are some passengers on the familiar yellow bus.

THOSE PASSENGERS are some prominent people who are trying to make some obvious political capital of the bussing issue.

In fact, if things go far enough, every political candidate may open his public comments with the phrase, "I'm opposed to cross-district bussing" and then go on to tell people why he is the best man for mayor (or city council or school board trustee or township board member).

Anyone who has been to any bussing rallies attended by more than five persons in the past month has seen former State Sen. Robert Huber on hand. If he isn't there, then there is his state income tax reform group armed with petitions in the back of the hall where the rally is being held.

ANOTHER guy who is

trying to ride the yellow school bus for all the political mileage he can get out of it is Harvey Moelke, former Livonia mayor.

In the weeks before last June's Livonia school board election, the former mayor and his supporters announced a sudden recall petition drive in a move to defeat two Livonia school board members seeking re-election.

The move was partially successful in that one of the two incumbents lost while the other won another term.

Now the recall drive has reached new heights—or should it be called the lowest depths?

PERSONS with recall petitions have been manning booths at Livonia Mall, telling shoppers that several school board members are in favor of cross-district bussing.

This flat allegation, combined with a petition shoved in front of the busy shopper, can prove to be political dynamite in the hands of the uninformed.

That the board members involved in the recall campaign are actually opposed to cross-district bussing and opposed the resolution for entirely other

reasons seems to carry little weight with the people heading the recall drive.

ANOTHER party taking advantage of the bussing controversy is Redford Township Clerk Ruth Sullivan, who also happens to be opposed to reform of Wayne County's antiquated government.

At a Redford chapter meeting of the National Action Group (NAG), Mrs. Sullivan made some arguments that county home rule would deprive local communities of various powers and give county officials the right to tax people without a public vote.

That may be all fine and dandy, but what does county home rule have to do with bussing at a NAG meeting?

Also at the meeting in Redford was former Sen. Huber, who contended that giving the vote to 18-year-olds is an indication "how we are losing control of the government," according to a release from the Redford NAG group.

That is where we came in. Let's hope the bus makes a stop someplace and dumps some unwanted passengers off at their front door.

Abe's Style Best

Friday is the 108th anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's dedication speech at the national cemetery near the battlefield of Gettysburg, Pa., a speech that is as thrilling to read today as ever.

In part Lincoln lives today because of what he said; in part, because of how he said it. His thoughts are crisp and direct, his language lofty without being inflated.

But what if Abe Lincoln hadn't written in his style? Suppose he had written in the jargon of an educator—a governmental or corporate bureaucrat—or worst of all, a military man. What would the Gettysburg address sound like?

It is a question I pondered a few years back while snuckering

at the composites that a second lieutenant had posted on a military bulletin board. So I borrowed his favorite phrases, recast the Lincoln speech into the style of DOD and USAF (that's Dept. of Defense and U.S. Air Force, for the uninitiated), and it came out like this:

"ON 4 JULY 1776 our prior officials announced the issuance on this continent of an updated nation, formulated in liberalized authorizations and in commitment to the policy that all personnel are created on an equilibrated plane.

"Effective 12 April 1861 we are mobilized in great inter-state combat activities, determining whether the above nation or any ally, neutral or hostile nation so conceptualized and so dedicated, can long be in endurance.

"We personnel are in formation on a great scene of operations of that interstate conflict. We are in participation to designate a portion of that scene of operations, as a terminal interim place for those who met their demise that that nation might remain functional. It is altogether in conformance with established procedures that we accomplish this.

"BUT IN A maximized sense, we cannot designate—we cannot commission—we cannot regulate this ground-level area. The obedient personnel, ready and expired, who were engaged here, have commissioned it far above our limited authorization to supplement or delete.

"It is for us the ready personnel, contrariwise, to be commissioned here to the uncompleted mission which they who combatted here have thus far so efficiently effectuated. . . .

"That we here adopt a maximize; resolution that these deceased personnel shall not have expired ineffectually—that the above-stated nation, under the Great Commander, shall have a new series of liberal codes, regulations, manuals and authorizations—

"And that government of the personnel, by the personnel and for the personnel shall not cease to be operational."

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