

OBSERVATION POINT

Legislative Session Proves Inadequate To Suburban Needs

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

In our current governmental setup, the place where most problems affecting the suburbs are sorted out is not our own local city council (jurisdictional area too small) nor the Congress in Washington (jurisdictional area too big) nor the Oakland or Wayne County Board (power too limited). Rather, if suburban problems are going to be solved at all, they will be settled in Lansing in the State Legislature.

This year's session of the State Legislature adjourned last week, and it only seems fair to take a look at just how the suburbs fared this year at the hands of our lawmakers.

In general, it was an odd Legislature, marked by the usual excesses of windbagism and a difficult partisan situation. Too often the Democratic majority in the House couldn't get together with the Republican majority in the Senate (or vice versa), and too often even the governor couldn't get together with leadership in his own party.

It was a legislative session marked by enormous delays at the start (mostly political in nature) and a big fight over welfare spending (an issue which most folks in the suburbs like to find irrelevant) at the end. In between and at the very end, however, some signs of motion pertinent to us in the suburbs could be seen.

THE BIG STEP was, as usual, to have more taxes. This time it was a 50 per cent increase in the state income tax, which will hit suburbanites harder than

other people simply because average income in the suburbs is higher than elsewhere in the state.

The Legislature gave Wayne County the power to levy a five per cent tax on hotel and motel rooms to help raise \$2.5 million for the new stadium in downtown Detroit. What this probably means is that Oakland County won't get similar taxing power for the proposed stadium site near Pontiac, and that in turn probably means we'll all keep driving downtown to see the Lions and Tigers after the new pleasure dome is finished.

The Legislature balked Wayne County Community College out of its financial mess, which is a very good thing, since the college is filling a vital need.

That's about the extent of the list of legislative accomplishments, as they bear on the suburbs.

THE LIST OF failures to act is much longer and much, much more depressing, since the Legislature knew at the beginning of the year that there was a genuine suburban crisis in certain areas but did very little about it.

Education is the biggest. Until the Legislature figures out how to finance the schools by means other than the outmoded and unfair property tax, no school district in this area has much chance of passing any millage at all.

The Legislature knew this, but did nothing this year; in the meantime, our school systems (which constitute one of the main reasons people moved out to the

suburbs in the first place) are being ravaged by rising costs.

Next year is an election year, and I doubt if a majority of the legislators have the guts to face the education financing issue; this means it won't be until 1973 that we have much chance of solving the problem, and by then the damage to our schools may be irreparable.

CLOSELY LINKED to the schools issue is another area of legislative inaction: mass transit in the metropolitan area.

The governor proposed an increase in the gasoline tax to finance a mass transit system that anyone who has fought the battle of the freeways every morning knows is a key suburban need.

The road building interests, the auto clubs, and the oil and gas lobby all worked hard against the bill, and it is now stalled. Curiously, black legislators from Detroit fought it, too, on grounds that the money would be spent to bring whites into and out of Detroit along the Woodward corridor.

The emphasis on the Woodward corridor makes little sense to me, but both white and black legislators ought to understand that the same transit system that takes whites to a job in the city can equally take black workers to equally needed jobs in the suburbs.

IN ADDITION to the main failures in education financing reform and mass transit, the

Legislature also short-changed the suburbs on billboard control. The Schoolcraft expressway will shortly be completed, but legislation to control billboards along its length in Redford Township,

Livonia and Plymouth is still stalled.

The Legislature will convene again after the holidays. We can only hope that its accomplishments will be more relevant to the suburbs this year than last.

CHRISTMAS VANDALISM — IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE SANTA CRY!



Bulb Stealing Thieves Darken Christmas Joy

EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer was covering the police beat and reading constant reports of vandalism last year when he wrote this article. It is reprinted by popular request.

By MAURIE WALKER

Once upon a time, it was the custom every Christmas season for people to brighten up their homes with outdoor decorations.

Lights would be strung across the homes and on trees and Santa or a snowman, all aglow, would make every neighborhood a holiday wonderland.

People would enjoy riding through the streets to view the colorful spectacle. Neighborhoods would often hold contests to see whose home had the most original or unusual outdoor decorations.

BUT LITTLE by little, homes became darker during the yule season. People didn't bother to put lights or decorations outside their homes. Except for Christmas trees peeking through windows, the neighborhoods were as dull during the holiday season as on any other winter night.

What spoiled all this beauty? Each year reports increased of vandalism to the decorations. Hours spent brightening up homes were destroyed in minutes by thoughtless people who lost or never had the Christmas spirit.

Instead of enjoying the beauty of the season, there were those who got their thrill out of destroying — pulling lights out of their sockets, smashing plastic Santas or stealing sentimental decorations. This was their idea of the Christmas spirit.

Year by year this destruction of people's time and efforts to help make Christmas bright showed an increase. The fact that

these items also cost money meant nothing. Consequently, each year fewer outside decorations appeared in the neighborhoods.

PEOPLE became discouraged, some even heart-broken at the destruction. In some instances, just the stealing of a few lights, so they could be smashed on the pavement, was enough to discourage people from brightening up their homes.

City decorations too, fell victims to wanton destruction. Hundreds of dollars in lights and other decorations were ruined. City governments finally gave up the idea of trying to brighten up the holiday.

True, there are still a few who put up outside Christmas decorations. There are still places where vandals can celebrate the season.

Gradually, though, the picture is changing. Thanks to those who hate the season, hate beauty, probably even hate themselves.

Christmas is becoming darker. Soon, those who like to destroy, who have no consideration for others, will have to find other means of causing despair.

The thought that they have made someone unhappy, made someone cry, others angry, doesn't matter. They have had their warped fun.

AND ONE of these Christmas seasons, very soon, the cities, with their colorful neighborhoods, brightly trimmed buildings will be just a memory. The spirit of Christmas will be locked safely inside every home.

There will be no more happily lighted streets.

And the darkened world will be a sadder place for all.

New Era Dawning In Talks?

By LEONARD FOGER

There may be a new era dawning for public employees' contract negotiations and the taxpayers will be better off for it.

If all goes well, and this writer feels it will, the guy on the street who pays the bill through his taxes for teachers, city employees and other governmental workers, will know considerably more about how contract talks are going than in the past.

A GRAPHIC example of how contract talks and their details are given to the press and the public was shown last week by the Wayne-Westland Community Schools.

If other governmental agencies and unions follow the example of the school board, it means a major change in how contract talks are handled.

The Wayne-Westland school board took out prominent ads in three Westland newspapers last week — at a cost of just over \$510 — to tell the public its position in a contract dispute with the Wayne-Westland Education Association, which represents teachers in negotiations.

THE BOARD printed the newspaper ads to counteract teachers' union published comments it felt were inaccurate.

To get its side presented to the public the board took public tax funds and made sure the public got the message.

The teachers' union in the Wayne-Westland school district not only had no major objection to the publishing of the ads during contract negotiations but didn't have any moral hangups on the ethics of using public taxes to pay for the ads.

The union — which responded to the board's published ads with a two page press release of its own — also refused to argue about the apparent unfair labor practice of one side of the negotiating table revealing information during contract talks.

In past practice in virtually all communities, there is an official news or information blackout on contract negotiations and both sides usually adhere to the practice of not commenting to the press about the progress of negotiations.

IN THE present situation in the Wayne-Westland district, not only are both sides discussing at length the progress or lack of it at the negotiating table, but both sides are divulging offers and counter-offers.

Most labor relations purists will object to this practice on the basis that the administration and union are actually "negotiating in public," which is considered something of a cardinal sin by management and union people.

An informal survey of other school and union people in Westland and neighboring communities revealed that only one person — a school board member — objected to the use of public funds for what the Wayne-Westland school board did last week.

Although the Wayne-Westland school board's action to print newspaper ads in the contract dispute may be an isolated decision in an unusual situation, this writer feels that new ground in labor relations has been broken.

The next step that should be taken is to make contract negotiations more of an open matter so that the public can know more about what's happening at the negotiating table.

Emory Daniels writes

'Bunglers' Bungle Again

Farmington Township trustees have always experienced pain finding funds for roads and community parks and other services which would benefit people.

But the board found it relatively easy to raise \$118,000 to construct a fire station to be located in its largest industrial park to protect rich tax base.

UNWILLING to risk a millage election, the board creatively employed a nuisance tax in the form of a one per cent tax collection fee to come up with funds without a vote of the people.

State law provides that townships without fulltime treasurers may levy the one per cent on each tax bill to pay the treasurer's salary.

Farmington Township has an elected treasurer who receives a full time salary and continues to hold an outside job by appearing in the treasurer's office on a part-time basis.

But he is being paid, and the fee is not necessary to pay for expenses of the treasurer's office. And the board does not have any intention of using the \$118,000 for the treasurer's office.

THE FACT that nuisance taxes are available does not justify their use. Use of the fee cannot be justified by arguing that residents have defeated township millage proposals five or six years ago and cannot be depended upon to approve one.

Some members of the board, such as Earl Oppertbauer and

Thomas Nolan, once argued that the board should not commit large sums of monies to projects without first receiving the will of the people through the ballot.

Indeed, Mr. Oppertbauer then stated: "When it comes to expending monies voted for a particular purpose, I will follow the expressed mandate of the taxpayer and never use the subterfuge tactic of diverting funds previously expended from other non earmarked sources merely because it would be legally permissible to do so."

That dubious approach is one they took on parks but did not follow when they decided to finance the new fire station with \$118,000 collected without vote of the people.

THE FIRE STATION in the industrial park can be justified because of the closing of the station on the Star Cutter property. But it is important that residential areas be equally considered, and it is expected the board will take prompt action in locating a replacement for the station on Northwestern Highway and consider the condition of the Wheeler Station in southeastern Farmington Township.

The board has never exhibited brilliance in determining priorities of the township and establishing programs to meet those needs. Instead, it bungles from month to month and attempts to overcome crises one at a time. Sometimes they can pull a rabbit out of the hat with a \$118,000 tail.

The time has passed for the board to decide which jobs should be done and how to finance them — even (Heaven forbid!) if it means placing a millage proposal on the ballot.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher
The Livonia Observer - The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer - The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer - The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Farmington Township, Canton Township, Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland, Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms, Village of Beverly Hills.