

OBSERVATION POINT

Lawmakers Delay; People Get Stuck



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

It's both depressing and boring to write the same sentence yet again, but here goes...

The State Legislature has botched it up.

What this time?

Last week, our sterling lawmakers adjourned the session in Lansing without coming to agreement on just how the state is going to solve its education financing crisis. The specific action (or lack thereof) was the State Senate's failure to pass a resolution placing on the November ballot a referendum on the issues of reducing to zero the property tax and replacing it with a graduated income tax as a source for state aid to education.

This means that any resolution of the crisis facing local schools won't come about until next year.

IN THE MEANTIME, we'll have to live with a property tax that is unfair, inadequate and outdated.

We'll have to get along with a taxpayer revolt which, quite properly in my opinion, refuses to pass most local school millages.

We'll have to see crises in local school systems, similar to the most recent one in Farmington, which nearly destroyed the entire extra-curricular program.

We'll just have to ride with a situation in which no school

board feels comfortable about signing contracts with teachers' bargaining units because they don't know where the money is coming from.

Etc. Etc. Etc. I hope our lawmakers had a nice Labor Day holiday. It takes a lot of plain hard work to get the state into the pickle it's now in.

LET'S BE FAIR. The State House passed a compromise constitutional amendment which would have eliminated the ban on a graduated income tax and replaced the property tax with an income levy.

Gov. Milliken bought the plan and tried to sell it to the

State Senate. He got most of the Democratic votes there, and three or four GOP state senators (including Sen. Carl Pursell, who represents part of this area) to go along. But the Republican leadership and the majority of the GOP Senate caucus wouldn't buy it.

Now the governor says he's going to try a state-wide petition drive for a constitutional amendment abolishing the local property tax as a means of financing public schools.

He deserves a lot of praise for trying, but somehow state-wide petition drives just don't come off.

POINTING THE FINGER

of blame in a situation as complex as this one is always difficult; besides the general level of common sense in Lansing is so often so low that this particular problem seems more the norm than any aberration.

But one area state legislator who prefers not to be named says privately that much of the problem lies in the leadership of the Republican majority in the State Senate. For reasons the lawmaker does not clearly understand, the majority of GOP state senators are fiercely opposed to a graduated income tax and are darned if they're going to let the issue come to a vote of the people.

The same lawmaker also adds that Gov. Milliken's liaison with the Legislature isn't all it should be, citing as evidence that the governor couldn't even get his own party to buy his compromise arrangement on school financing.

But the full blame has to be shared by the entire State Legislature, for failing to recognize that the crisis in education financing is of its own making and that simple responsibility requires a full effort, regardless of political party, by the entire Legislature to rectify the situation.

That didn't happen, of course.

So let's hope that next year things will be different.

Tim Richard writes

Why A House Of Lords?

State Sen. Carl Pursell of Plymouth is a believer in governmental streamlining, county reform, mass transit; he thinks in terms of solving problems rather than imposing an ideology; he is low-key, a family man, a sports fan.

Such a politician should have a group like the board of the Michigan Jaycees eating out of his hand, but Pursell got beaten recently.

The Jaycees heard Pursell speak against the proposed one-house legislature, but they went ahead and endorsed Rep. Joseph Swallow's petition drive to put such a constitutional amendment on the ballot.

PURSELL'S APPROACH

Sense And Nonsense

A team of Michigan State University researchers recently went to a lot of trouble and expense to destroy one of society's most endearing myths—that chivalry is dying.

They hired actors to stage mock fights between men and women and then hid behind one-way mirrors to see what non-suspecting bystanders would do.

Whenever the fight involved a man beating up a woman, no male bystander came to the woman's aid. But men did step in to help other men in fights between two male combatants.

Apparently the researchers were too young to recall the era of crowded buses and trains.

was scholarly, full of quotes from professors, at least in the advanced text he provided the press. But in citing the advantages of a two-house legislature, the senator failed to come to grips with the most important historical problems.

The origin of the two-house legislative body, as I read history, is the division between nobles and commoners—the House of Lords and the House of Commons. There were different sets of interests and a different house for each.

In America we have no titled nobility — not even the Kennedy family — and so one reason for having a double-headed legislature promptly disappears.

Historically, states patterned their legislatures after the two-house U.S. Congress. But the U.S. Senate represents states, rather than populations, and again there is no logical reason for having a second legislative house on the state level.

For some years, Michigan's Senate represented geographical areas while the House represented populations. But with the U.S. Supreme Court's wise decision in favor of the "one-man, one-vote" principle, both houses are today apportioned on the basis of population.

Thus, the two major uses of an upper house in the legislature—to represent nobility and land—no longer are valid in Michigan.

THIS LEAVES the two-house legislature, with only one saving grace—of dubious distinction. The theory is that if a bill has to go through a second house, it will be

studied more carefully and defects corrected. It reflects the Founding Fathers' obsession in favor of weak government.

Well, consider what and whom state government must deal with today.

General Motors Corp. has a one-house board of directors. The United Auto Workers, the Teamsters and the Michigan Education Assn. have one-house boards of directors. So do the Farm Bureau, Consumers Power, the United Conservation Clubs, Trout Unlimited, the Temperance Society, the Michigan Assn. of School Boards — all have one-house boards of directors.

Why, then, should state government be hampered in its dealings by having a two-house legislature?

Why should Michigan still be stuck with a House of Lords?

Mayors Set Double Standards

By LEONARD POGER

Two recent actions and utterances by Observerland mayors makes a taxpayer wonder about the use of a double-standard when it comes to considering the quality of political leadership.

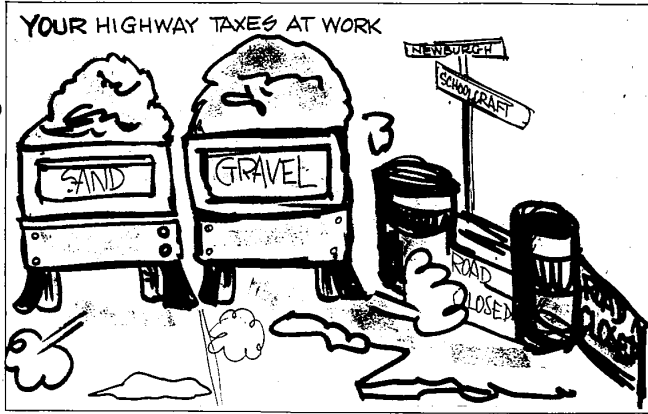
In one case, involving Livonia's Mayor Edward McNamara, the chief executive issued a formal protest to the state Public Service Commission to object to a proposed rate increase sought by Detroit Edison Co.

Rate increases for public utilities are as easy a target as air and water pollution these days, but what makes McNamara's protest so feeble is that he failed to raise a voice to object to a proposed rate boost for Michigan Bell Telephone Co. — another utility from which the mayor is on a leave of absence while working in city hall.

Moving south, Mayor James Lowe of Garden City cast the deciding vote recently in a controversial 3-2 vote to refuse National Bank of Detroit an extra lot for additional parking.

The crowd was unanimous in its opposition to the bank proposal and Lowe commented, "I can't go against the people."

But Lowe had a different stance several months ago when he voted in favor of a proposed urban renewal program for the city's downtown section, a proposal opposed by several hundred persons at a public hearing.



R.T. Thompson writes

Is Road Work Worth It?

Is the final result going to be worth all of the present trials and tribulations?

That's the question before residents of all communities in the path of the new freeway along Schoolcraft and Haggerty Roads. And right now there are a good many that would answer a loud "no."

They have been plagued by clouds of dust that have polluted the air as high as one could see and extending all through the area.

They have seen little regard to courtesy of the road on the part of the huge trucks whose drivers seem to feel they have a perfect right to do most anything, and the heck with motorists.

Huge tractor-trailer trucks carrying thousands of yards of dirt from the area to Lord-knows-where, going side-by-side up and down Schoolcraft Road, holding back long strings of cars.

MOTORISTS HAVE seen routes changed during the afternoon with slight regard to signs but dangerous curves ahead.

They have seen Farmington Road at Schoolcraft changed into no turns and only one line of traffic going north and none south...no advance notice given at all and resulting in huge traffic jams.

To add to the harassing conditions, the State Highway Dept. and the Wayne County Road Commission, principally the former, have picked this time to start road work on every main artery through the City of Livonia.

Try as one wants, there isn't any way to get through Livonia without running into a detour of some kind.

Just to make the matter even more binding, the excavators in

several instances have cut through telephone cables and left areas without service until Michigan Bell can make needed repairs.

THEN THERE IS another change which is bothering business leaders in Plymouth.

Original plans called for an exit on Northville Road which made for an easy entrance to the city. But that has been eliminated because of cost, and now the only exit west of Levon Road in Livonia is on Sheldon Road on the outskirts of Plymouth.

This change probably will

result in a court suit and at least numerous hearings. Plymouth businessmen feel it will hurt business and keep prospective customers away.

They believe the change and elimination of the exit was done without general knowledge of the communities involved, and they are plenty mad about the whole thing.

Perhaps this is what is known as progress; perhaps such gripes arise with every freeway development. But that doesn't alter the fact that traffic conditions in the communities involved are in a mess and will be for some time.

A Community Feast

It's almost as if the good folks of Plymouth try to do too much when it comes Fall Festival time.

Yet year after year, beginning on the Thursday after Labor Day, the hundreds of members of civic organizations keep adding to the scope of their four-day fete in one of Michigan's prime examples of good old-fashioned family neighborliness.

What began in 1956 as a Rotary barbecue with fewer than 200 guests on a single late-summer Sunday afternoon has grown to become an occasion of myriad lures which on the current weekend are expected to account for 60,000 persons from throughout southeastern Michigan swarming into Plymouth's downtown Kellogg Park.

Visitors to the Plymouth festival don't just eat, they feast. That remains the heart of it all: A chance to break bread with friends in the town square, chat a while, and meander among the concession booths and view the

special attractions such as the Antique Mart or the Arts and Crafts Show.

The festival is a throwback to America at the turn of the century when entertainment revolved around the downtown bandstand. In Plymouth this weekend it does again. If you like Bimbo's Gaslighters, the songs of Livonia's Civic Chorus, the precision drills of Jackson's Zouaves, rock groups, or even the unique sound of a calope, it's all there — plus the pet show, Gay '90s costumes and band concerts that helped make life enjoyable for our grandparents.

There's a secret to Plymouth's success, of course. It's an easy one to find and one to admire: The teamwork of its citizenry. We salute Festival President Joe West, his director and all those participating for showing others how to work together in a community cause.

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