

OBSERVATION POINT

Will School Bussing Come To Area? Probably Not

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

That last week's bussing hassle in Pontiac erupted with the violence it did should have surprised nobody. After all, bussing stabs a bigger bunch of tender nerves than any other public issue today — race, education, safety of children in school, citizen control of the schools, parent control of children.

The suburbs from here to the south of Pontiac are virtually entirely white, with the exception of a part of Westland. They are quite different in racial composition from Pontiac; their school systems are quite different; the social problems these suburban communities must overcome are not those facing Pontiac.

Yet the bussing of children to the north has touched off a wave of fear here. Unfortunately, the best way to put it is also the most blunt: "When are they gonna start bussing niggers in here?"

THE ANSWER IS probably not for a long time, if ever. A number of reasons have been offered explaining why bussing probably won't occur in these communities. Most of them are wrong.

1) The courts don't have the authority to bus students across school district boundaries. This is nonsense, particularly if a case testing this issue comes before a federal court.

2) Massive citizen protest will stop any bussing before it gets started. The Pontiac situation put this argument to the test, and as the second week of bussing goes on it seems that even the National Action Group's protest is gradually fizzling out. Further, most of the American public still holds to the idea that you don't break the law, and if bussing happens to become the law I think most people will eventually accept it.

3) Bussing isn't really needed, so it won't happen. This is a toughie. Probably it is the last thing parents think they need; but if we're going to have a multi-racial society eventually, as Rev. William Ritter argues in our Ecumenical Reflections column in this newspaper over the weekend, the enriching experience of integrated schools is a terribly important one for the kids.

THE REAL REASON, in my view, that we probably won't see bussing here is that it doesn't really solve the base problem, which is savagely segregated housing patterns. If our housing were not split into black and white areas, we could have integrated neighborhood schools without having to resort to the bussing expedient.

Unfortunately, recent evidence suggests that the housing

problem will be a long time in its solution.

The Detroit Free Press, in a recent series of articles on integration in the suburbs, suggested that the process is not really taking place.

This is partly because of suburban income discrimination in the kinds of housing local communities are allowing, and partly because black people no

longer are much interested in accepting the aggravation and expense of moving to integrate white suburbia.

A recent poll, taken by some University of Michigan social scientists, makes the same point. It concludes that "although most blacks have not abandoned their support of integration, our data show that they are beginning to lose the passionate sense of

commitment to the ideal which once existed."

The survey also suggests that massive white resistance to bussing school children will meet only light counter-pressure from Negroes.

Bussing may be one step to a fair, open society, as the courts have suggested. But it looks as though it will be a long time coming to this area.

Tim Richard writes

Mayor Makes Westland Go

The irony of it is that you wouldn't expect it out of Westland — a city that was incorporated "defensively," to protect the tax base of a shopping center from the City of Livonia's annexation attempt.

Westland is the kind of a city where you would expect a low-tax, "caretaker" government. Instead, the mayor's office generates a stream of creative ideas, and it may fairly be said that its occupant, Gene McKinney, is the only political leader in Overland with a coherent program, and one of the few who tries to run a city like a city. A big boost in fire and police staffs... a parkland program with vision... an aggressive paving program... a concerted effort to hire top administrators... a youth council... an ombudsman proposal.

"WESTLAND HAS a kind of inferiority complex," says Mayor McKinney, who grew up in the meandering suburb that was once Nankin Township. "They've let government (in the past) go to people who are prone to let the inactive attitude compound itself. An awful lot of people here are always letting somebody else do things."

On top of that, some of Westland's abler young residents are men on the way up, bedding down there until they make enough money to jump to Canton or Livonia or Farmington. The result: A lot of community talent

is lost. McKinney plan: Zone in some big lots for big houses.

Shaped like a half-finished jigsaw puzzle, Westland is encroached on by Wayne, Garden City and Inkster and has little community pride. McKinney has systematically run a textbook program to give it an identity — he got Wayne school district to change its name to Wayne-Westland; he started a historical commission that is getting the community its first state historical marker soon; there is now an annual festival and each Christmas there's a tree-lighting ceremony. "That's all part of getting people involved in the community," says McKinney.

THE FACT THAT McKinney has moved so professionally in a town that isn't used to it has got him in some hot water with the electorate.

His ambitious paving program was countered by lawsuits, and the opposition has nominated three of its forces to the city council. If McKinney boasts about the administrative talent he has hired, others accuse him of hiring some non-residents. The only mayor besides Gribbs of Detroit to hold regular press conferences also gets accused of (a) having a captive press and (b) failing to communicate.

McKinney allows as to how "(b)" might be correct. His ombudsman program, borrowed from "Action Line" which in turn borrowed it from Swedish

municipalities, is aimed at tuning in to the little man's gripes. McKinney's campaign will also be aimed at communicating, and in the works is a booklet he's thinking of calling "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Westland But Didn't Know Who To Ask."

If he's re-elected, McKinney figures he and Westland will both have "turned the corner," and the next two years will be aimed at bringing to fruition a lot of the programs that have been started in the first two.

McKINNEY HAS lots of photos of his hero, the late President Kennedy, in his office and quotes JFK frequently. But except for the Irish name, writing talent and the boyish good looks, the resemblance ends there.

McKinney is a problem solver, not an image-creator. For so active a mayor, he has virtually no clashes with the council, whereas JFK had minimal influence in Congress. City hall is no frenetic firework of ideas; rather, there are a half-dozen carefully thought-out plans, which work.

Where JFK was an inspiring orator, McKinney on the stump is low-key almost to the point of being dull. And for a man who has started annual ceremonies to cultivate civic pride, McKinney hates ribbon-cutting himself. If the Democrats ever run him for governor, they'll have to give him some acting lessons first.

His political future? McKinney declares he hasn't mapped out any. He and his wife have adopted one small child and plan to adopt a second, and Observerland's youngest, most creative and most active municipal chief executive declares:

"I haven't even gone into the PTA stage yet."

WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT IF THEY ALL LIVED IN THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD?



Leonard Poger writes

Did Board Make A Boo-Boo?

The Wayne-Westland Community Schools erred in setting an advisory election to try and resolve the Hamilton School sled hill controversy.

Advisory elections — like weapons in the hands of children — can be dangerous to the community.

We are not anti-democracy nor opposed to people getting involved in the affairs of their governmental agencies.

BUT THE Hamilton sled hill was probably the worst issue to be the subject of an advisory election in which the results aren't binding on future school board action.

Regardless of the results of next Saturday's unusual election, there are numerous factors at work which would make the results meaningless and provide hollow victory for which side emerges as victors.

The sled hill's location is opposed mainly by residents whose backyards abut the school property. They have legitimate reasons for disliking the hill and its location and we can't blame them.

But since most of the Hamilton parents who will vote on the

proposal are not faced with the same problem, they would probably vote in favor of the hill's retention.

LIKE INTEGRATED neighborhoods, airports and expressways — everyone is in favor except the people who live within one block.

If the routes of future public facilities were put to advisory elections, voters close enough to use the facility without putting up with its inconveniences would favor its construction.

The only outward opposition would come from those who live next door to a proposed freeway or airport and would be outvoted in every instance.

The only previous contact with an advisory election by this writer demonstrated that point in its classic form.

ABOUT 13 YEARS ago, Shelby Township voters in Macomb County were asked to express their opinion on a rezoning proposal which would allow for an Indianapolis-type racing operation on the former Packard Motor Car Company's proving ground.

Residents near the track were fearful of traffic jams, beer bottles deposited on their front lawns, and "riff-raff" endangering their wives and children on weekends.

To make a long story short, the rezoning was approved at the advisory election by a 2-1 margin in a record turnout of registered voters.

Advisory elections shouldn't become a general practice. Taking that first step, the Wayne-Westland School Board may be taking a dangerous one which it may regret later.

ONCE the pattern is set, the board will be hard pressed in the future to deny an advisory election by a group of parents who want to change the board's public stance on an issue.

Although the proposal will probably pass by a large margin there is a feeling in the back of our minds that maybe the issue should result in a deadlock and let the matter return to the school board table for a decision — where it belongs.

Sense And Nonsense

If you have a streak of political curiosity, you may have wondered why the New Democratic Coalition of Livonia, the Schoolcraft College Faculty Forum (teachers union) and the Campus Globe (student newspaper) all endorsed the same four candidates in Monday's trustees election.

Well, there was a reason. NDC was gracious enough to list the members of its candidate review committee, and one of the names was Larry Vandermolen — the same Larry Vandermolen who was chairman of the Forum's political action committee.

Also on the NDC review group was Mark McQuestion — the same Mark McQuestion who is a columnist for the Globe and covers Schoolcraft board meetings.

In the days of Fisk and Harriman and the robber barons of industry, they'd call that an "interlocking directorate." What do they call it today? Probably "democracy in action."

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

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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, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms,
Village of Beverly Hills

Sense And Nonsense

"Representative Stempien Reports" said the heading on a two-page, single-spaced bulletin from Livonia's man in Lansing, but he certainly didn't report much.

Stempien's report to the taxpayers mentions 27 different bills or major programs, including the income tax increase, the graduated-rate tax proposal, the 18-year-old vote and so on. But

never once — no, not at all — does Marv Stempien tell how he voted.

There are also dandy political analyses of Democratic and Republican positions on such matters as property-income tax reform, but Stempien never mentions, for the benefit of the newcomers in his mobile city, what his own party affiliation might be. You have to read the newspaper to learn he's a Democrat.