

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Unfair Property Tax Linked With Bussing Controversy

In the alarm and confusion surrounding Federal Judge Stephen Roth's ruling that Detroit's schools are segregated, an equally important news story has been submerged.

This is a direct legal attack on the local property tax as the base for school financing, initiated last week by Gov. William Milliken and Attorney General Frank Kelley. If the state Supreme Court agrees, the Legislature will be forced to restructure totally the financial underpinnings for all schools in this state.

This could be the most revolutionary change in the history of Michigan education.

THE KEY point in the argument to be made to the Supreme Court is rooted in both the Michigan and the U.S. Constitutions: equal protection under the law.

This legal principle has led, among other things, to the "one man, one vote" ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court, which eliminated population differences between legislative districts and made each person's vote count the same.

If applied to the local property tax as the source of school funds, it would seem to eliminate the clear difference in tax revenue available per pupil from one school district to another.

For example, the Garden City school district in 1970-71 spent an average of \$758 per pupil, while Farmington spends \$946. This is because school millage and the value of taxable property differs greatly between different districts.

If the challenge to the property tax succeeds in the Supreme Court, we can expect some kind of flat per pupil education grant, applying to each pupil regardless of where he or she lives.

THIS IS the point where the attack on the school property tax and Judge Roth's ruling come together.

There were two key points behind the suit charging that Detroit schools are segregated. The first is that any school system that separates the races is inherently unequal. The second is that the Detroit school system is in fact not as good as other school systems, mainly because Detroit's city taxes are so high that its residents haven't been able to afford the school taxes that suburbanites pay.

If aid to education is equalized throughout the state by elimination of the property tax,

the second point behind the Detroit suit will have been directly met.

Whether that will be enough to convince the courts that on balance the first point in the suit is itself is not enough to require bussing of students across school district lines is, of course, not clear.

But the success of the suit

Tim Richard writes

Boom Is Worse Than You Think

The population boom isn't as bad as you thought it was. It's twice as bad. Three things pointed this up during the last week.

What makes population increase so bad for the environment is not just that there are more people, but that the people use up resources at an even faster rate.

The latest figures indicate the birth rate is declining, and this lulls some folks into ceasing to worry about population. But the facts are that the population is still rising; that the present slowdown may well be normal for conditions of war and economic recession; and that the pressure on the environment is really what we should be looking at.

For example: **HOUSING** - The number of dwelling units is rising faster than the population, according to the latest census figures compiled by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

Southfield from 1960-70 showed a 120 per cent increase in population but a 131 per cent increase in the number of dwelling units.

Canton Township's population rose 107.5 per cent and its dwellings by 127.4. In Garden City there were 10 per cent more people, 15 per cent more dwellings; in Plymouth Township, 109 per cent more people, 144 per cent more dwellings; Westland, 50 per cent more people, 82 per cent more dwellings.

What's happening is that more single folks are getting their own apartments, more older folks are maintaining their own residences and not moving in with the adult children, and to some extent families are smaller.

(Incidentally, this is why so many of our Observerland politi-

cians were shocked that their census figures weren't bigger in 1970 -- they had based their population estimates on the number of occupied dwellings, and so they got exaggerated figures.)

Whatever the reason, the plain and simple fact is that our consumption of the land is outstripping our population growth. **CARS** - In this week's supply of handouts, the Michigan State Highway Dept. reports that cars are multiplying twice as fast as people in the U.S. It seems that population growth is 6,000 a day and auto registrations rise 12,000 a day.

The same package of handouts quotes the president of the National Highway Users Federation for Safety and Mobility as warning the highway industry that it's "under attack."

He labels as a "myth" the charge that "highway interests are over-paving the country."

The speaker, D. Grant Mickle of Washington, D.C., is partly right; the way we're buying cars, we will need more highways. But he is on dangerous ground when he insists that highways don't ruin the environment and aren't strangling cities.

He ought to figure out how much land in (say) downtown Detroit is eaten up by parking lots, or how much land is wasted on paving in our grid pattern of subdivision streets, the most inefficient street pattern known to man.

SCHOOLS - The figures out of the Plymouth School District zapped you right between the eyes. Enrollment rose 5.6 per cent, the budget by 11.3 per cent. In other words, the school district was spending money twice as fast as the kids were coming in.

In terms of personnel, you would expect a school district to add a teacher for every 25 new pupils, but Plymouth was adding staff at a considerably faster rate.

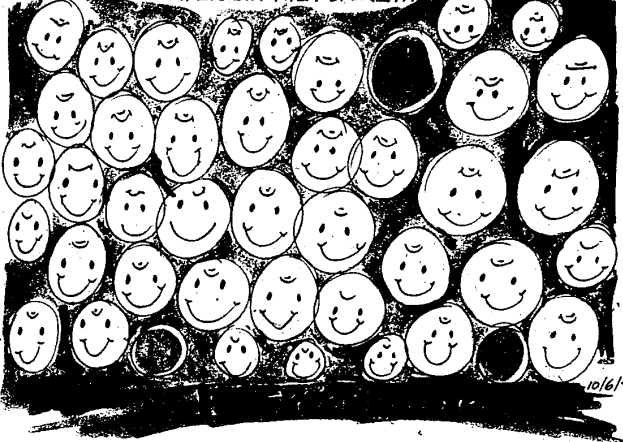
The Plymouth figures happened to catch my eye, and I don't mean to pick on that district. Most of them are like that.

What's most disappointing of all is the reaction of some of our so-called leaders. Dr. Granville Sewell, a hot-shot from Columbia who spoke recently at Schoolcraft College, could think of only reducing tax exemptions as a method of discouraging population growth.

Sen. Bob Griffin, visiting in Livonia, said the growth increase is easing and avoided any further thought or word on the subject.

The population problem is more serious than that, gentlemen. It's about twice as bad as you think.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH POPULATION: TURN THIS CARTOON UPSIDE DOWN FOR A LOOK AT THE FUTURE...



R.T. Thompson writes

Thanks To 3 Hard Workers

A new broom sweeps clean. Apparently that is what is happening at Schoolcraft College although many of those swept aside in the recent change of administration moved out of their own volition.

There isn't any question that the new president, Dr. C. Nelson Grote, will start from scratch with an almost completely new board of trustees.

He is the new president and he will be working with a board that includes only two holdover trustees, neither with more than two years experience.

Thus Dr. Grote and the eight member board will start together to guide and develop the growth of a college that already has made

astronomical advances under the leadership of retired President Dr. Eric Bradner and a group of trustees, that had numerous changes during the growing years.

WE BELIEVE THREE retiring members of the board deserve accolades for their outstanding work during the past 11 years. The three: Mrs. Jane Moehle of Plymouth, Clarke Oldenberg of Garden City and Paul Mutnick of Clarenceville.

They attended meetings in the old Newburg School in Livonia where conditions were anything but ideal. Cold in the winter, hot in the summer with wasps flying overhead most of

the time to keep the trustees on 'edge constantly wondering if they would strike... one knows from experience that wasp bites can be very painful.

Then there was the matter of working with Dr. Bradner to fill the administrative posts necessary for the early planning of any college.

One of the first appointments was that of Pat Butler, of Plymouth, as librarian. It was one that had to be filled by a capable person since the library had to be started well in advance of any buildings.

Then came the big moment when the board approved the site at the corner of Haggerty and Seven Mile Roads in Livonia. The excitement of gathering in the kitchen of the Esch home for the signing of the papers and the first glance of the big hayfield that was to become a community college.

They made a trip to California with the architects to study campuses there and to get ideas of what would make a beautiful but functional campus in Livonia.

THEN CAME ANOTHER big moment... the ground breaking for the first building and Schoolcraft College was on its way.

Finally, classes started and the trustees thought they could breathe a bit easier. Small chance for almost immediately the question of finances came up and had to be resolved. It was for the time being but has been a constant problem since.

Then came the crisis over the use of the "word" which caused more hours of discussion in closed sessions. There wasn't any question but that the board was split over the issue and finally made a decision that satisfied some but not all.

During this same period the enrollment had climbed from 1,000 to more than 6,000 which brought additional problems.

Through it all, the three original trustees kept plugging away, taking the good with the bad. They weren't always right but they did what they thought was necessary and proper. The three deserve a vote of thanks for a job well done and that's what we are saying now.

Emory Daniels writes

A Political Copout

One of the most futile efforts towards social reform in this country is the courage now being taken by the courts to order bussing of school children between districts to obtain integration in the schools.

Bussing to obtain integration is futile because the goal is realized only for seven hours a day and during the other 17 hours the races continue their separate existence.

Bussing to obtain integration is a copout as well as an insult to the American quest of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness for all citizens.

FOREMOST AMONG the many objections which can be made against bussing is the fact that children are being punished for the mistakes of adults. The youngsters have not created our segregated society and should not be subjected to the many abuses of having to be bussed miles. Better that we bus adults.

Still better yet, however, that we tackle the problem headon and begin making significant inroads in integrating the suburbs. Let President Nixon, Attorney General Mitchell and Chief Justice Burger get tough with the bankers and real estate

men in this country and let them know the equal opportunity laws in this country can no longer be skirted.

If the suburbs of Detroit were sufficiently integrated, the necessity would not exist to bus children so that, at least for a few hours a day, white and black persons could mix.

Bussing is an issue today only because the Nixon, Johnson, Kennedy and Eisenhower administrations refused to force integration in the suburbs. Only Harry Truman had guts enough to meet the civil rights issues squarely and honestly.

Attempts to integrate the schools are a political copout because what's needed is to tackle the sophisticated techniques employed by suburbanites to maintain their islands of mercy. Until forced integration is attempted, this country will continue having civil rights problems.

And we'll continue playing silly games such as bussing children to achieve integration in the classroom. Someday, when America grows up, we won't have to "guess who's coming to dinner" because it really won't matter.

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