

'There'll Always Be A SEMCOG' -- Fitzpatrick

By W.W. EDGAR
When he takes over as the new SEMCOG chairman at the annual meeting Friday, Robert FitzPatrick, current chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, is planning to chart an entirely new course for the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments.



"Educators are a group unto themselves and do not always work for the common good... We'll go on making decisions that could affect them."

--Robert FitzPatrick

As the lone nominee for the position now held by Mel Ravitz, head of the Detroit City Council, FitzPatrick will waste little time swinging into action in an attempt to give a new image to SEMCOG, a six-county voluntary association.

"We've been sitting on our hands too long," he stated, "and the time has come to do some positive thinking and take some positive action."

"It's time we stopped begging for members and starting showing the way to make them want to join," he continued. "That can be accomplished only by positive action -- and that's just what we're going to do."

THE INCOMING chairman pointed out that new rules which permit the county to guarantee the dues of all eligible members in the county will be a big help.

"This means that there will always be a SEMCOG," he emphasized. "The \$199,000 the county board pays in guaranteed dues will be refunded as each community pays its dues."

"This means that the county will hold the seats of all those entities who haven't joined or paid dues. We'll vote them, and these communities won't have a voice until they pay their dues and take an active part."

"In practice, this means that the non-members are asking that we make decisions for them rather than having a voice in any action that will have effect on their own communities."

The new chairman is confident this approach will give SEMCOG a new image and make the organization attractive enough for all communities to take part.

WHILE HE WOULDN'T admit that it ever would be used as a club, he did point out that SEMCOG must act on federal grants for all entities and that it would be simpler to approve those for member communities.

Among the positive actions he hopes SEMCOG will take are in the area of police and fire protection.

Pointing out that it would be a break for the taxpayer if the smaller communities would contract with a county for these services instead of absorbing the expense of providing their own, he said:

"There's no sensible reason why every little community should be burdened with buying equipment and furnishing buildings when the service can be contracted for at a portion of the present expense."

THE WITHDRAWAL from membership of some of the school districts -- notably Livonia, Plymouth and Farmington within the past year caused the incoming chairman to remark that this is "short-sightedness and a rather selfish attitude."

"Educators are a group unto themselves," he said, "and do not always work for the common good. They are interested only in what SEMCOG can do for them and not what overall good can be accomplished."

"Somehow, they don't realize that the over-all good of a community or area will include them, too. They seem to forget that, as I said, 'there will always be a SEMCOG, and we'll go on making decisions,' decisions that could affect them."

ALTHOUGH some municipalities may think that affiliating with SEMCOG would cause them to lose their individual identities, FitzPatrick was quick to point out that was not the case and that SEMCOG never was intended to cause the loss of individual identification.

"It just stands to reason," he said, "that there are many things that can be accomplished by joint effort that would be almost impossible for the smaller individual political subdivisions."

There's the matter of drainage, sewage disposal, environmental programs and the like that can be brought about more easily when we join forces.

"What would happen if each community had to furnish its own?" he asked.

"That's why SEMCOG has to move off dead center and take some positive action. We've got to show these communities we mean business and that things can be done."

HE REPEATED that SEMCOG no longer is going to beg for members. Rather, it will show the way to bigger and better things for all in the area.

And wouldn't it be better, he asked, "if all communities

in the area had a voice in arriving at decisions rather than just a few? One thing is certain -- the decisions are going to be made, and it is short-sightedness if they don't take part."

One of the top priorities will be mass transportation. Like the weather, many persons talk about it, but few do anything.

"We no longer can put it off," FitzPatrick stated. "Transportation is one of our biggest problems. It could be the one program that would link all integers. So why wait?"

Just what course the mass transportation problem would follow FitzPatrick didn't state. But he did promise some objective action.

"We're going to be positive," he repeated. "No longer are we going to put things off we're going to make decisions."

THEN, HOPEFULLY, he added, "we are going to show the outsiders that things can be done... that problems can be solved... and outstanding services can be rendered."

"In short, we're going to change the entire SEMCOG image and make membership attractive."

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PLAWECKI criticized the Senate for failing to enact a House amendment which would allow local communities to adopt ordinances regulating billboards if the local ordinance is stricter than the state law.

"I believe every community should have this right," Plaewcki said.

"Some type of legislation regulating billboards must be adopted by the Legislature, however, because federal officials have already warned Michigan that it will lose \$19 million in federal highway funds unless it adopts such a law," he added.

Sen. William Faust (D-Westland) was absent for the vote and Sen. David Plaewcki (D-Dearborn Heights) and Daniel Cooper (D-Oak Park) voted against it. The split followed party lines.

THE BILL passed in a 20 to 11 vote (20 votes are needed for passage) and was referred to the House for concurrence on amendments. It had been passed by the House in a 73-19 vote just before it recessed for Christmas.

Opponents of the Senate version said it watered the bill down, rendering it ineffective. The House had approved a version that would permit local ordinances to tighten state controls on the size and placement of billboards.

The State Highway Department would have the authority to prohibit construction of billboards and to take down those that fail to meet state specifications. The specifications are that signs would have to be at least 500 feet away from expressways, at least 200 feet from main highways in non-urban areas, and a least 100 feet from roads in incorporated areas.

Milder Billboard Rules Passed

A milder version of a state billboard bill passed the Senate last week with the approval of only one Observer-led senator.

State Sen. Carl Pursell (R-

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