



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Local School Board Elections Hold
Important National Political Truth

Folks who are willing to run for and serve on local school boards are in a very real sense the unsung heroes of the suburbs.

They spend money, take verbal abuse, sit endless hours at meetings, crush their home life — all in service to their community and its children. Each candidate, winner or loser, deserves a real pat on the back for being one of those few who really do something concrete to make our system of democracy work.

Less than two weeks from today — on Monday, June 11, to be exact — members of local school boards will be selected by area voters. Three members of Schoolcraft Community College's board will also be elected by voters in affected Wayne County communities on the same day.

The elections came at a good time, partly for local reasons and partly because they offer such a very direct lesson about our political system and the significance of the Watergate revelations to it.

LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE of the school board elections will be considerable.

The Plymouth board, with few experienced members, ran last year into a messy situation over failure to renew an administrator's contract. Garden City, with a record of never turning down a millage request, certainly wants a strong board to continue its outstanding record.

Farmington's board, plagued in the past with a liberal-conservative split and a penchant for secret meetings, has a chance to bring new faces in and make a new start. Livonia, whose board was famous for factionalism a couple of years ago, has gained calm with two new members; this year's election will test whether sensible, middle-of-the-road sanity will be dominant as the board selects a new superintendent.

Schoolcraft College badly needs a change in attitude on its board, which has been rent by political and personal squabbles for the past two years. The college reportedly is on the verge of losing by resignation its respected president, Nelson C. Grote, and although no one's saying it, my guess is that he can't stand the bickering.

THE LESSON about our political system taught by our local elections and by the Watergate scandal is that when you elect people to office with a fixed term, disproportionate amounts of time, money and attention are devoted to the matter of getting elected and not enough effort, scrutiny and evaluation are spent on performance in office after the election.

Take the Livonia school board election, as a case in point. Over the weekend, a newspaper broke the story that one Livonia

candidate for a four-year term, Charles Chandler, has mailed out his campaign literature together with applications for absentee and disabled ballots to a list of local voters. In view of the fact that city elections officials regularly send out such applications themselves, Chandler's tactic, though probably not illegal, is at least confusing to the voters; Livonia City Clerk Addison Bacon labeled the practice "kind of dangerous."

The point of the episode is that a candidate, knowing darn well that once elected for four years he is very, very unlikely to be recalled, is willing to bend the unwritten rules of fair campaigning to get a little extra edge, secure in the idea that once elected no one will remember the dubious way it happened.

IT'S NO BIG jump to apply this lesson to Watergate.

Ever since the 'war, political scientists and elections experts have been developing a vast mass of information about voting behavior, much of which indicates that most people don't pay much attention to politics except at campaign time. Take that fact, and add to it the ability of public relations men who have so infested public life in recent years to manipulate and even lie to the news media, and you get a quite simple model for political success.

Do whatever you can to get

elected, because even if you are caught you will be serving a fixed term; nobody will care much; and besides, recall or impeachment is awfully rare.

There is evidence that President Kennedy may have gained his margin of victory in 1960 via vote fraud in Illinois and Texas. President Johnson had such a vast lead over Sen. Goldwater that he didn't need any funny business in 1964. And we all know now what President Nixon's campaign committee did in 1972.

Our system of government — with separation powers splitting the executive from the legislative, with a fixed term mitigated only by the awesomeness of impeachment, and with a bunch of PR guys manipulating a lot of very powerful electioneering techniques to concentrate attention on campaigns instead of in-office performance — has come to be the strongest force pushing us into that terribly dangerous conclusion that the end justifies the means.

One idea much talked about is to concentrate more attention on how an administration governs and less on how it gets elected by requiring cabinet members and perhaps even the president himself to submit to periodic question periods from the Congress.

Such a move would not damage our system of separation of powers. It would force attention on what an administration is doing

while it is in power. It would open up an administration to outside views and help do away with the pernicious notion that any criticism no matter how constructive signifies disloyalty. Most importantly, it would help

remind people in the government, in the Congress, and in the voting public at large that the real test of politics is not how someone gets into office but what he does once there. It's an idea worth considering.

FREQUENT EXAMINATION
CAN PREVENT SERIOUS DISEASE



Tim Richard writes

Differences Slight In Busing Cases

The U.S. Supreme Court is a court of last resort. It not only decides major constitutional questions, but it also must resolve differences when different circuits of the Court of Appeals make conflicting decisions. That is why it's virtually certain the Supreme Court will one day decide the Detroit-suburban school segregation case.

The 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, while ordering District Judge Stephen Roth to rehear some details, indicates it will uphold his ordering of cross-district busing to achieve school integration. On the other hand, the 4th Circuit shot down Judge Robert Merhige when he attempted to do the same thing with Richmond, Va. schools and neighboring Henrico and Chesterfield counties. The Supreme Court last week split 4-4 on an appeal from the 4th Circuit's ruling and so the anti-cross-district busing ruling was upheld.

Lawyers caution that there are differences between the Detroit and Richmond cases. Wade

through the hundreds of pages of opinions and orders, and you'll conclude the similarities are overwhelming, the differences trivial.

For example, Judge Merhige in effect ordered school district lines dissolved in Richmond while Roth didn't. To a pettifogging lawyer, the distinction is important. To the student of practical politics — indeed, to the students of the affected schools — the difference is zero.

Indeed, the cases are so remarkably similar that the 4th Circuit Court pointed to Detroit (among other cities) as an example of the nationwide pattern of racial housing. And Roth quoted Merhige's Richmond decision (now overturned) in coming to his conclusion.

The Supreme Court won't be deciding two different cases. It will be choosing between two major philosophies of law.

The 4th Circuit can be called "conservative" or "strict constructionist." It accuses Judge Merhige of "imposition of a fixed racial quota" which is "beyond

the power of a district court," noting that "the Constitution imposes no such requirement."

It notes that Virginia school boundaries have been largely the same for 100 years and haven't been altered for the purpose of segregation.

It finds no deals between the three counties to keep blacks in one place. It finds "myriad reasons," economic, political and social, for the concentration of blacks in Richmond but sees no "invidious state action" to blame. Judge Roth is impatient with such tight reasoning.

With a shotgun blast, Roth blames "the community as a whole" — federal, state and local governments; real estate firms and lending institutions; even blacks themselves who, "like ethnic groups in the past, have tended to separate from the larger group and associate together." There is enough blame for everyone to share.

Roth will probably be upheld in his finding that the state and the Detroit school board were guilty of segregation within Detroit, but there's reason to think the Supreme Court will reject his order for cross-district busing. The reason is Lewis Powell, the associate justice who abstained in the Richmond decision because he had been a member of that school board.

It's a gamble to guess in advance how a judge will vote; folks thought FDR appointee Felix Frankfurter and JFK appointee Byron White would be raving liberals, or that former KKK member Hugo Black would be a reactionary, and it failed to work out that way.

Nevertheless, Powell is a Nixon appointee, and Nixon deliberately looked for the sort of strict constructionists that occupy the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. The Las Vegas oddsmakers will be picking Powell to make a 5-4 majority overturning Roth's busing order.

And ghoulish as it may seem, one must remember the odds that

one of the four "liberal" justices will retire or drop dead are greater than for the "strict constructionists."

If indeed the Supreme Court rejects cross-district busing, it will be a great victory for the calm heads who advised the suburbs for the last 18 months against boycotts, marches, constitutional amendments and threats and instead said to fight it out in court.

Leonard Poger writes

Westland Needs More Open Space

The issues are about the same. A property owner has a developer ready to build a shopping center along with single family homes on the presently-vacant 112-acre Birch Hill golf course in Westland.

The details are a little varied from other suburban developments proposed over the years but the principles are the same.

Another familiar pattern is the public opposition of neighboring residents at planning commission and city council public hearings.

Usually, the political sentiments are formulated after the public outcry has been heard.

In the Birch Hill rezoning issue, Westland Mayor Eugene McKinney proved that the best defense is a good offense and last week announced he is "vigorously opposed" to the rezoning.

His announcement came before the planning commission and planning department study and recommendations.

But his decision may head off another controversy and maybe convince the developer to look elsewhere for his profits.

The issue over Birch Hill isn't the first time the attractive green

stretch of open space has been the center of a development proposal.

It first came up in the spring of 1966 and it was about 15 months later the Westland city council voted 4-3 to reject the developer's plans and leave the 112 acres open.

There are at least five new faces on the council at present and we hope they follow the lead taken six years ago.

In the rapidly-growing suburbs, open space is at a premium. So is land suitable for park and recreational uses.

Too many suburbs are learning their lesson — the hard and expensive way — that it is cheaper to reserve recreation land early and have it available at a later time when there is money avail-

able to develop it for recreational use.

Despite the hue and cry for more tax base expansion to keep local taxes at a reasonable level, there is a louder demand for open space and recreational land for the ever-expanding leisure time available to suburban residents.

Birch Hill may or may not be eventually used as a golf course as it has for many decades. But there is nothing wrong with a few wide open acres of green space.

New England communities, large and small, acted wisely in preserving a green area of "common" in the center of the city. This is evident in Manhattan's Central Park and numerous other suburbs outside of Boston.

Closer to home Plymouth has the attractive Kellogg Park in the center of its downtown business district and that historical decision looks better all the time.

Let's hope the Westland city council follows the lead of other people-minded public officials across the nation and avoid falling into the trap other nearby suburbs have fallen into by letting developers make permanent decisions for the rest of the community.

Sense And
Nonsense

Current favorite for the 1973 Plastic Culture Award was an ad that appeared recently in the comic section of one of the Detroit dailies: "New Lipton Fruit Drink. Now an instant drink with all the flavor of canned."

Editorial & Opinion

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