

The Presidency: A Superman Is A Super-Target

"Maybe we should do it a different way," said Sen. Gene McCarthy after Robert Kennedy's assassination. "Maybe we should have the English system of having the Cabinet choose the president."

McCarthy, who isn't afraid to slice to the heart of a problem and propose an unconventional answer, was addressing the question of how to avoid the assassination of a president or presidential candidate.

So far as we can detect, he is the first person to come squarely to grips with the heart of the matter. It's not a matter of fewer guns or better Secret Service protection but of a fundamental problem:

The presidency itself is too big for one human being. No one is really capable of filling the sort of superman role the presidency has become.

That's the political side. On the psychological side, a president or candidate becomes a natural target for what a psychiatrist has called "magnicide—the killing of someone big."

THE PRESIDENT is the chief of government. He is the ceremonial chief of state — and this alone can be a killing task, even if there were no bullets to speed the process.

The president is head of his party. He is the real leader of his party's forces in Congress.

He is chief spokesman for the free world. He is the leader of the nation, the spokesman for those who have no other voice, the embodiment of the national character.

He can't be all those things and all that perfect, and so part of the political process involves an advertising campaign that is a lie — making voters believe that this candidate or that is really that beautiful and can really perform all that anyone expects.

The late H. L. Mencken summed it up neatly when, singling out one party, he said that Democrats tend to pump up their president so much that they begin to promote him to the first vacancy in the Holy Trinity. The Republicans, with Eisenhower, learned the game, too.

NELSON ROCKEFELLER, when he was an assistant to President Eisenhower, thought of creating two executive vice presidents — one for domestic affairs, one for foreign. Cabinet officers would report to their respective EVPs, and some of the workload would be shifted from the president.

Such a solution would help solve the administrative part of the presidential problem, but it fails to tackle the problem as a whole.

Sense And Nonsense

Is it because the Vietnam mess is so officially a "war" that servicemen's families have not been able to find those service flags to hang in the window? The flags were also scarce during Korea, but World War II saw them in every house. Do we have to declare a "war" before the flags become available in the market place?

It's one of the wonders of the world of academia that a sophomore knows so much more than a senior.

McCarthy's solution will be particularly unpalatable to Democrats, who tend to go nuts with their "leadership" syndrome, but it comes closer to solving the problem. He would have the president share his authority with the Cabinet and the Senate.

McCarthy's suggestion that the Cabinet elect the president was a spur-of-the-moment thing, apparently, but it deserves more consideration.

THE BRITISH HAVE a good way of handling it. They pick a royal family; it is a symbol of the nation; it presides at functions; everyone—Liberal or Conservative—loves it, no one hates it because it has no power to do wrong.

Then they leave the real work of national leadership to a political professional, the prime minister, who is picked from the ranks of the Parliament. He is less hated than an American president because he stirs up less psychic energy in the populace. He has more time to run the government because he has some one younger and prettier to cut the ceremonial ribbons and wave to the crowds.

Such a system also tends to bring forth a more able person as chief of government because the people who know the government best do the picking. It assures the chief of government will have the respect of those he must deal with.

Under such a system, John and Robert Kennedy wouldn't have become presidential timber — at least not as soon as they did. Neither of the two older Kennedys was more than a second-rate senator; neither was a leader among the men who actually pass our laws; both had bad reputations for failing to do their legislative homework and paying too little attention to committee work. (Brother Ted, however, is reported to be different.)

The result was that the one Kennedy who did become president had one of the least successful administrations of any man with a congressional majority in modern times. His only innovation, the Peace Corps, was begun with an unspoken "Wile. House appropriation that he didn't have to ask Congress for.

MEN WHO PRETEND to be serious writers on American politics praised Kennedy for bringing the nation something called "style" and a belittled Lyndon Johnson for his cowboyishness.

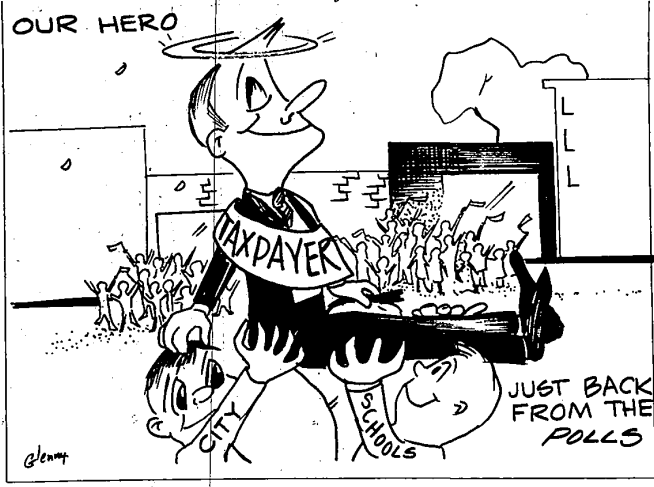
Well, "style" didn't pass medical civil rights bills, poverty programs, aid to education. A political pro got the job done. One may not like those programs, but one can't help admiring a man who is successful at accomplishing what he advocates.

Yet it's a psychological fact of American life that people need some sort of hero to set styles, patronize the arts, top the coal mines, symbolize our national vigor. This the Kennedys did. If it weren't unconstitutional, the Kennedys would have made a lovely royal family.

So perhaps the presidency should be split functionally, with a beautiful person or a great white father-type as the non-partisan ceremonial chieftain and style-setter, and a political pro selected by Congress to run the government.

A radical idea? A little. But it's not as radical as killing off presidents with overwork — or with bullets — which is what we're doing now.

—Tim Richard



From the Publisher's Desk OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power

Somehow, let's bronze a taxpayer for a time capsule so the history writers will know who really held the world together.

It'll be confusing enough to contemplate the dollars we showered on split ends and right infielders, movie stars and booze. And how little we spend to find a cure for mental retardation and cancer.

It's enough to make a rational man who pays taxes in his Kool Aid, since most of them can't afford much more. So let's hear it for the taxpayer. Really!

LAST WEEK HE WENT to the polls in Farmington to approve a 4-mill property tax increase for 10 years for schools. In Plymouth, it was an \$11 million bond issue and another 1.5 mill tax boost.

Garden City passed a 11.6 mill tax renewal and an increase of 7.5 mills. South Redford approved a 3.5 mill proposal for operational costs and Redford Union a 4-mill boost for the same reason. Wayne Community School district went for a one-year levy of 7 mills.

The cynics who push bureaucracy's pencils and shuffle its papers were shaken. It brought back the creed of that late and great newspaper sage, Frank Morris, who swiped it from a Scot:

"Just let me lie and bleed awhile — and I shall rise and fight again."

Taxpayers already are bent under the load of the idiotic property tax, recently increased; the new state income tax; the threat of a new federal surcharge of up to 10 percent on their income; increased driver license fees.

The state even raised the marriage license fees, though — like capital punishment — hasn't turned out to be a deterrent.

With all this, the wise guys were saying any millage increase would die on the ballot. And it would have been understandable. People can take just so much.

THOSE WITH FIXED incomes are hurt most by property taxes. They still have to buy food and shelter, pay medical bills and buy birthday presents for the grandchildren.

These elections showed that the people are more responsible than bureaucrats figured, more aware and more willing to make sacrifices for their children and the community. Education these

days is a gigantic maw demanding a porridge of dollars.

On the other side, there are more kids to educate, higher salaries — and deserved, too — for better trained and more dedicated teachers, more searching for better ways to prepare young people for an increasingly complex world.

Livonia's school people have been holding off on millage, stretching the dollars and pennies. Prudence is a good word here. Check the number of administrative vacancies and other cutbacks. They're negotiating now with teachers, who are far

below the going rate in Detroit, for example.

There will be a deficit in Livonia this year, it now appears. There may be a millage request — heck, there'll have to be — sometime. You can be sure the schools will need it when it comes.

We think it would be great for every community to proclaim a Taxpayer Appreciation Day. Maybe have a parade with Thank You floats prepared by the departments of the city.

But we couldn't even give our hero a drink of water as a gift. He pays for that, too.

Garden City School Voters Keep A 'Streak'

Most of the money questions in last week's school elections were approved by voters in more than a dozen districts in the metropolitan Detroit area.

But one figure that went unnoticed was that Garden City's approval of two millage proposals continued a "victory streak" long admired by other school board members and administrators.

In the past 16 years, Garden City voters have approved 25 money questions without a single defeat.

This is impressive in itself. But the record shows that many of those proposals carried by margins unheard of in school circles.

For example, a proposal for a bond issue and a resulting tax increase of 6.5 mills (\$8.5 per \$1,000 of state equalized value, carried by a 3-1 margin. Two years later, another bond issue, worth \$1,250,000 and a 6.75 mill tax increase, carried an overwhelming margin of 6-1.

GROWTH PROBLEMS were continuing to loom in the city in the 1950's, and in 1955, a \$3,300,000 bond issue, which did not bring any rate increase, carried 5-3-1.

Bond issues are usually easier to sell than operating millage proposals, but in the latter department, Garden City voters did not slow down there.

Although the millage proposal last week carried by only 59 votes, other millages in the past 15 years carried by margins of 5-2-1, 3-7-1, and 3-1-1.

Another important area was the local balloting for the formation and financial support for Schoolcraft Community College.

To organize the district, Garden City had a 7-6-1 favorable margin although the proposal was defeated in other districts.

At a special election several months later, Garden City came through with a 5-9-1 margin.

ON MONEY PROPOSALS for the college district, Garden City approved all four tax requests by overwhelming margins, in a few cases providing the winning margin since other local districts rejected the proposal.

A prime example of how the voters feel about their school board members was shown in 1960 when the community agreed to pay their members' expenses, an issue which is traditionally defeated in most districts.

In this age of higher taxes and public rejection of tax requests, it is refreshing to see the continuing optimism of the Garden City School District.

We hope that their "victory streak" will continue to stretch in future elections.

—Leonard Poger

THIS IS THE WEEK THAT...

by DON HOENSHILL

The cycle is complete now, folks.

Get this from the State Department of Education:

"A 35-year-old former football player from Michigan State University and his 23-year-old associate are cutting a path through official state government red tape.

"Six-foot-four Morley Murphy, a 28-20 Rose Bowl victory over UCLA in 1954, and Jim Hogue, a recent Hope College graduate, are working . . . to cut down the tide of official forms which sometimes engulf schools officials and teachers."

This department alone prints about a million forms a year. It has its own print shop. That means it has printers. And super-visors. And secretaries. And janitors. And a pension plan.

There's speculation that the reason state buildings had to be reinforced is the sheer weight of paper.

THE HIGHWAY department figures that when the paper used in planning laid side by side equals the length of the freeway, the project is ready to start.

The same formula is used when constructing a state skyscraper, only the critical measure is weight. A billion-ton building requires a billion pounds of paper. Something like that.

Now the state has hired a former football player (the state didn't say he knows anything about paper) and an aide—since nobody takes you seriously if you don't have an aide or a rubber tree plant—to cut down on paper work.

The cycle?

First somebody decides government pencil sharpening operations are in need of centralization. It costs maybe \$10,000 a year, a hypothetical figure for the sake of illustration.

Then a director must be hired and he needs a secretary to file the job applications and write reports to his commission. The secretary, of course, needs a desk, typewriter, filing cabinet.

There must be a study made of pencil sharpening, so an expert is hired from another state. He needs assistants to collect and analyze data and write reports to the director which must be rewritten and sent to the commission, then rewritten and sent to the Legislature for printing in the House and Senate Journals.

Equipment — a new computer processed sharpeners capable of handling 40 every 11.7 seconds—must be purchased and installed. Requisitions, vouchers, specifications, bids, supporting documents and records. Now the original secretary needs a pool of stenographers.

THERE MUST BE an auditor to keep track of everything from dollars to paper clips. You need paper clips for this purpose. Since clips hold two or more pieces of paper together, you need more paper.

Next you need a personnel man — later a staff for him, too — to figure hourly, weekly, bi-weekly and annual salaries, insurance and tax withholding, to interview job applicants and make recommendations in five copies.

Now it's in operation — except that the paper work keeps every body too busy to sharpen pencils. So more people must be hired and placed in a separate section to do this work.

The enlarged staff requires more space, so a new building is constructed. Travel is required so a fleet of cars, one truck (panel) and a fork lift truck are needed.

FORTY YEARS LATER, when the Bureau of Pencil Sharpening has grown to one of 19 major state departments, the staff now numbers 1,374 and is housed in seven buildings, the cycle is almost complete.

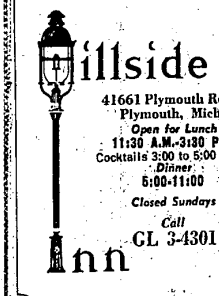
The director, now a \$35,000 a year man, figures that to leave his mark on society he must develop a new idea—revolutionary. The only problem left is paper work and that's it.

What you do is hire a football player and give him an aide to eliminate the paper. This will require secretaries, a staff of cars, fringe benefits, insurance, vacation and sick leave time and like that.

Eliminate paper?

It would take another 20 years and maybe another bureau just to explain to the employees' association why you're eliminating jobs and depriving people of a livelihood.

One, two, three, hike, Mr. Murphy.



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