



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Proposed Merger Of County-City Health Departments Should Pass

If you drive down Merriman Road into Westland, you'll see on the east side of the road the giant complex that is Wayne County General Hospital. Near it is an office of the Wayne County Health Department.

The City of Detroit also has a health department, which is supposed to coordinate and cooperate with the county. Although people from both the city and county health departments have tried, they have not been able effectively to coordinate their separate programs.

● Nearly 4,000 mothers annually in Detroit fail to get before and after birth medical care and counseling, despite the fact that six different agencies in the city and the county offer such services.

● City-county programs to control tuberculosis have been stalled for years because of a fight between the two health departments about what is the best method of treating the disease.

● One of the biggest health problems of our time is the mushrooming spread of venereal disease. Effective programs to cope with the problem have never got off the ground because of a city-county debate on who was responsible for funding and operation.

● Recently a city-county health director of public health resigned because of the constant fights and bickering between the two local governments.

IT'S AN APPALLING situation, and one that shouldn't be allowed to go on any longer.

And fortunately, something is being done about it.

In a just-released report, a special Detroit-Wayne County task force has recommended the merger of the two health departments.

Specifically, the committee suggests creation of a five-member County Health Board, with three representatives of the county picked by the board of commissioners and two city representatives picked by the mayor. This board would select a county health director, who would merge the operations of both departments within one year.

The report also advocates increased citizen participation in public health matters through a system of advisory councils and establishment of a new management-planning unit to tighten up administrative procedures and get better use of the tax money spent for public health.

The report has been submitted to the County Board of Commissioners and the Detroit Common Council.

JOHN McCann, Wayne County Commissioner from Livonia, served as co-chairman of the merger study committee. He backs the merger: "Bally-hoo and huffing and puffing, the worrying, and threatening, about cleaning up the environment will be no more than that unless we put together the government system needed to do the cleanup job. A powerful public health system with an efficient environmental control program that unifies action for the entire county would be possible under a single city-county health department."

Other advantages of the merger include elimination of the bickering and fighting between the two departments that have paralyzed effective health programs in the past, reduction of overlapping administrations to get more coherent direction and policy formation, and elimination of some duplicated positions with consequent reduction in operating expenses.

The study committee also

argues that the merged department would be one of the biggest in the country, and thus more able to get an increased share of federal public health funds that are becoming available.

OF COURSE, the argument isn't all one-sided.

If the plan goes through, Detroit would gradually cut its share of funding responsibility, which means that over a period of time county taxpayers would have to pick up part of the tab. Then, too, there is the worry that a merged health department might spawn a huge, expensive bureaucracy.

But, on balance, the argument clearly favors merging the two departments.

Merger would bring more effective health care to the residents of this area, probably with increased federal support. It would stop the squabbling that has hindered health programs in the past, and it would allow a tough, business-like administration

which would save the taxpayers some money.

The Wayne County Board of

Commissioners and the Detroit Common Council should approve the proposed merger promptly.

TEAMWORK. AT LAST?



Leonard Poger writes

Tip To Voters On Tactics Used By Politicians

Suburban voters will soon be barraged by volumes of political campaign material in the next week or two by candidates for various state legislative, congressional, and county commission positions.

A newspaper editor is usually deluged with much more political material than the average voter reads in his favorite newspaper at home.

I FEEL this is a good time to let the average voter who usually doesn't know one candidate from another in on a few secrets of putting together campaign statements.

In addition, there are a few tricks to the trade of trying to con the voters that candidates wish the public didn't know about.

In the interest of public service, which includes spoiling a few political secrets, here are a few tips to the voting public.

Watch for the key phrases such as "busing, tax reform, welfare reform, representation of YOU the voter, and public service to my constituents."

LET'S TAKE a few of the key catchwords that politicians like to

use in the campaign without saying too much.

Busing is on everyone's mind. Most candidates - if they want to get anyone's vote other than their own and their wife's - are opposed to cross-district busing.

They always claim that parents "have a constitutional right" to attend their neighborhood school.

If a candidate tells you that, ask him which constitution he is referring to. The federal constitution in no way refers to neighborhood schools. In fact, the constitution doesn't even mention schools. Only the federal and state governments are named.

MOST CANDIDATES are "concerned" about tax reform. But they are careful to avoid saying whether they are opposed to reform or in favor of it. In addition, they are usually caught between one conflict and another when pressed on details.

For example, they want to reduce property taxes for schools but are reluctant to raise the state income tax to make up the difference. If a candidate tells you that he wants more services for less taxes, throw him out of the building. He is a fraud.

"Representation" is an important promise to taxpayers by candidates. If you happen to run into a candidate, ask him to explain in detail how he plans to carry out this goal.

MANY OFFICIALS usually lose touch with their supporters within hours after being sworn into office. They also get an unlisted telephone number and appear again only during the campaign for re-election for another term.

If an incumbent happens to mention such things as tax reform, welfare program problems, and the like, try asking him why he hasn't done anything about those issues while he is in office.

If he is a challenger, ask him specifically just how he plans to solve the tax and welfare problems.

Usually, you'll get some answer like "I'll have to give it more study after I'm in office."

Enthusiasm Wanes On County Home Rule

Two years ago, we gave a rousing endorsement to the home rule charter proposal for Wayne County. It was defeated, and the proposal has been placed again on the Aug. 8 ballot.

Things have changed since then, and we no longer have the same enthusiasm for county home rule that we once had.

WE NOTED in 1970 that the state law allowing county home rule was weak - that it fails to give counties the same range of options to restructure their 19th century forms of government that a different state law gives to cities. It's legally possible for a charter not to contain any changes at all.

Indeed, with the crop of relative unknowns running for charter commission, many of them obscure county employees, there's an excellent reason to think that an unaggressive, stand-pat, courthouse gang of candidates will be nominated Aug. 8 and elected in November. That helps dampen our previous enthusiasm.

What has happened since 1970 is that State Sen. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth), a vigorous reformer himself, has been pushing a bill to allow for a county executive - one who would have some real management and budget writing powers.

The bill has the strong support of Wayne County Commission Chairman Robert FitzPatrick (D-Detroit), a leading reformer.

OPPOSED to the Pursell bill - and advocating passage of the home rule proposal - are Prosecutor William Cahalan and other members of the courthouse gang.

We suspect they will work for a weak charter that will protect their little fiefdoms. We suspect they will try to hide behind a weak charter and frustrate efforts to get a strong county executive plan.

The fact that Pursell and FitzPatrick are opposing the present county home rule proposal impresses us.

We suggest to our readers that those who still want to see county reform go ahead and vote for the home rule proposal Aug. 8. There will be another chance to vote again once the charter commission has done its work. If the charter is badly written, we can always kill it at the second election.

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Sense And Nonsense

It looks like Canton Township is going to get another chance "to do it yourself."

Faced with the task of laying out the 20-acre park site made possible by state recreation bond money, Canton officials took up the offer of the Department of Natural Resources to do the layout at no cost to the township.

The township waited patiently for eight months for the DNR plans.

FINALLY, last week the "plan" arrived. It was a hastily penciled sketch on notepaper that looked like it took the best part of five minutes to prepare.

"We waited for eight months for this?" amazed and disappointed Canton recreation commission members asked.

What makes the incident doubly disappointing is the amount of time the township lost while DNR officials were supposedly working on the layout.

The "free" service turned out to be rather costly. That's one lesson the township learned. The other is that the expert is rarely the guy from out of town.

HCMA Deserves Support

"I like to pay taxes," Mr. Justice Holmes once said, "because with taxes I buy civilization."

Today, however, it's getting so that the reverse is true - we need taxes to get some fresh air and beautiful land in our rapidly diminishing outdoors.

Specifically, we need to pass Proposal D on the Aug. 8 ballot - a request for the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, which is probably the most efficient and service-oriented governmental agency around.

At present, HCMA gets a quarter-mill from within the constitutional 15-mill limitation. This proposal would raise HCMA's share to a half-mill but place it outside the 15-mill limit.

What we're really voting on, then, is a half-mill increase to be in effect split between HCMA and the County Tax Allocation Board of each county. How that quarter-mill would be split between county, townships and schools would be up to each county allocation board.

The quarter-mill increase for HCMA sounds like peanuts. On a \$30,000 house, it means a mere \$3.75 a year, but spread over five counties (Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Livingston and Washtenaw), it will bring in nearly \$5 million a year.

HCMA GOT its first quarter-mill in 1940 and in 32 years has developed nine metropolitan parks - including Kensington, Metropolitan Beach, Stony Creek, Lower Huron, Marshbank and Willow - in the valleys of the Huron and Clinton Rivers.

We continue to marvel at the superb job HCMA does in preserving the natural beauty, fitting thousands of visitors into the space so they don't bother each other, reaping the places clean, setting up eye-popping nature centers, controlling boat speeds, providing beautiful maps of roads and parks and canoe routes so the public can know what's available, maintaining clean beaches and clean picnic sites . . . and all with a fraction of the roadiness problems other parks have.

But times are changing. Our current population of 4.5 million will grow to 6.1 million by 1990; HCMA's land holdings of 17,000 acres need to grow to 35,000 acres to satisfy our increasing interests in the outdoors; more and more of that original quarter-mill is going into operations, and we all need to chip in \$3.75 or so more annually to provide more development funds.

WHAT WILL WE get for our money?

● Redevelopment of Belle Isle, which since 1879 has been a true regional park - a new beach, nature trails, a public marina, boat launch, cultural arts center, sports activities center and street lighting. It's a \$40 million project over 15-20 years.

● Another Oakland County metropark, somewhere between Kensington and Stony Creek. (The site can't be identified yet.)

● Mill Creek park in Washtenaw County, west of Ann Arbor. This 4,000-acre site (a little smaller than Kensington) would get a 650-acre man-made lake and facilities similar to Kensington.

● Point Mouillee park, 900 acres where the Huron River flows into Lake Erie. This would be essentially water-oriented; development is 10-15 years away.

ALTOGETHER, HCMA is talking about a \$100 million-plus program over 20 years with the money properly apportioned between Detroit and the suburbs. Since HCMA exists for only one thing - day use parks - there is no danger the money can be used for anything else.

We urge a "yes" vote. With these taxes, to paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., we will preserve nature and make civilization more bearable.

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Editorial & Opinion

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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