

'Equal' treatment isn't always fair

So you own this gas station on Eight Mile Road and times are baasad. It's winter and your hands get awful cold when you're jerking gas, and your allocation has been chopped from what it was last year, and then the oil companies bumped the wholesale price and only a whole lot of shouting got the guys at the Cost of Living Council to let you pass the increase on to your customers, but even then your volume's down so much you can't make it even on the old margin and then - Sweet Lord! - then what do they do?

Then they tell you that you can't take care of your regular customers. You can't save a little gas for the guy who's been buying from you for 15 years, or give him a slip in the line, or make an appointment to fill him up.

Why? Why? Because it's discriminatory, that's why. To take care of your old customer discriminates against the out-of-stater, against the guy who's just cruising. The government passes a rule that says you gotta treat everybody who comes to your station equally, or else you'll get fined.

And you're mad as hell.

AND I FOR ONE, don't blame you one bit. Because you're caught in one of the deepest and potentially most serious confusions in our existence as a nation.

A lot of people think that "equal" means the same thing as "fair." But it doesn't. Of all the ideas propelling the history of our country, equality is surely one of the most important. The Declaration of Independence speaks of all men being created equal; the 14th amendment to the Constitution pledges equal treatment under the law for all; the idea



Observation Point

Philip H. Power

of equality is the engine that drives the movement against racial discrimination.

But push the application of the idea of equality too far and our common sense notion of fairness is violated.

The gas station operator depends absolutely on his regular customers; day in, day out, they sustain his business, pay his nut. Over the years they have been loyal to him, and it's only fair that during the gas shortage this loyalty be returned - at the cost of treating casual customers unequally.

Just how strong this notion of fairness is can be seen by the fact that when the federal government tried to enforce the strict equality rule, a whole lot of gas station operators immediately started talking about shutting down.

CONSIDER TWO other examples of the fairness-equality conflict.

All children ought to have equal access to an equally good education. But is it fair to either suburban or in-

ner city children to bus them 20 or 30 miles to and from school each day?

All people ought to be treated equally under the law. Yet is it fair to order the cop on the beat to book the good kid who is caught on a first offense just like the repeated offender, when a little chat with the good kid and his parents might set him straight for life?

These examples help make clear the distinction between equality and fairness that I'm trying to make. Equality means just that; everybody is to be treated alike, pretty much regardless of circumstances. Fairness means that people are to be treated in accordance with circumstances, in ways appropriate to the situation, in the context of the relationship.

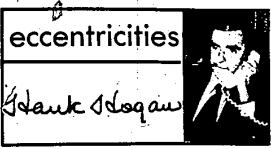
Equality, if pushed too hard, can lead to an inhuman kind of society, in which each individual is treated as nothing more than a statistic. Fairness, if pushed too far, can lead to a society of special privilege, in which class status represses simple humanity.

Both ideas - equality and fairness - are deeply embedded in the history and ethic of this country. Each is different; both are somewhat in conflict; and taken together, each limits the excesses of the other.

But in this age when the fashion is to talk endlessly of equality, the older more common sense notion of fairness seems to have slipped from our national discourse.

Perhaps that's partly why so many people are so sore and suspicious of our government, which, by forbidding gasoline stations to give their loyal customers special treatment, sacrifices fairness on the altar of equality and, in the process, devalues both.

Tennis has grown up in a few years



This has been and will be a very exciting week for tennis buffs in the metropolitan Detroit area.

For the last several years, the Junior League of Birmingham has sponsored the Virginia Slims Tennis Tournament. This year it will bring most of the top women players in the world to Cobo Hall to compete for a \$50,000 purse.

To show the growing interest in tennis, four years ago the sponsors hoped to attract 2,500 people into the gym at Oakland University. This Sunday for the finals they expect to sell out the 11,000 seat arena at Cobo Hall.

THE BILLIE JEAN King - Bobby Riggs match last fall has not hurt the popularity of tennis, and with Billie Jean being the feature attraction at Cobo this week, those who failed to make it to the match in Houston have an opportunity to see the "superspin" in action.

Cobo Hall has not been the only area of tennis activity.

In May, something new will be added to professional tennis - world team tennis.

Sixteen cities, including Detroit, have been given franchises to field teams of three men and three women who will play 44 matches over a period of three and a half months. Instead of individual competition, the winners will be determined by the total number of games won in three events; a women's singles, a men's singles and a mixed doubles event.

THIS IS OF SOME significance this week because last Sunday night at Centaur Farms Racquet Club in West Bloomfield Township, history was made by the playing of the first such match between the Detroit entry, the Detroit Loves, and a pickup team of Detroit Nationals, which included a non-playing captain by the name of Billie Jean King.

The purpose of the match was to see how long it would actually take and what the hitches were in the program format so that when team tennis starts in May, they would be able to put on a match within the 2 1/2 hours allocated by television.

The 2 1/2 hour event lasted about four hours, which showed the common sense of having a dress rehearsal early enough so the program could be pared down.

THERE IS A QUESTION as to whether team tennis will make it, since it has to attract between 3,000 and 4,000 to Cobo Hall for each of its 22 home matches.

The owners of the Detroit Loves, Seymour Brode and Marshall Greenspan, are confident because they can see how well Detroit has supported the Virginia Slims tournament over the last couple of years. They were also fortunate enough in the draft to pick up Rosemary Casals, who is one of the most colorful women's players on the circuit.

They say tennis is the fastest growing participant sport in America. The fact that the Virginia Slims Tennis circuit expects to attract 11,000 people to Cobo Hall on Sunday and the fact that the preliminary exhibition for world team tennis held in a little out of the way tennis house in West Bloomfield attracted an overflow crowd would indicate that tennis will become increasingly more important as a spectator sport in the next few years.

Tim Richard writes

Millage hike seems doomed

Crime. In every survey of people's concern about the issues of the day, crime leads the list. All the prosperity, all the natural beauty in the world, all the good health men can develop - all of it means nothing if our streets are so crime-ridden that it's unsafe to walk them, or unsafe to leave our houses at dusk.

Every public official with his ear to the wind is proposing to do something about crime - more police, more courts, more prosecutors, more equipment.

Taxes. That's the one thing people seem to hate more than crime. Or so it appeared from a public hearing last week when a Wayne County Board of Commissioners committee sounded out public sentiment on a proposal to place a one - mill public

safety tax on the ballot.

Sentiment was unanimously against the proposal of Board Chairman Robert FitzPatrick (D-Detroit), who, by the way, never showed up at the session. Another public hearing is set for the downriver area, and the scuttlebutt I get is that the tax package will be just as vigorously opposed there.

A third public hearing is planned for Detroit, but if a

couple of Detroit women who journeyed to Westland for last week's hearing are any indication, the proposal won't do any better there.

One can understand the county's point of view: It's under pressure from the courts to do something about the jail. It's under pressure on the question of juvenile facilities; it's threatened by judges who want to give their employees generous pay hikes and the heck with fiscal policy... and it's locked in on local revenues.

If the county alone asked for a tax hike, it wouldn't get anywhere because it's a remote unit of government to most folks - no source of home town pride. So Chairman Fitz concocted the idea of splitting one mill, 20 per cent to the county and 80 per cent to the 43 local cities and townships in Wayne County. They didn't bite.

One reason was that FitzPatrick came up with a formula that would split the local share on the basis of the 1970 census and the annually changing state equalized valuations. That clearly would work against the western suburbs where population is growing and in favor of the older cities where population is declining.

Another reason is that many cities haven't levied taxes up to their charter limits. Their councils simply don't need to go to the voters for more money.

A third reason is that Sam Turner (D-Detroit), chairman of the general government committee which conducted the hearing, failed to push the proposal. He could, for example, have asked witnesses opposing a one mill tax whether they would favor a half - mill; he could have asked city officials objecting to the formula whether they would have a different formula. Turner could, in short, have asked the public for constructive alternatives, but instead he chose to let the negative evidence pile up unopposed.

In the years to come when I tell this story to my grandchildren (an embellished version, naturally) I will pause and then add at the end in a deep, sorrowful tone, "Just remember you're in, going downhill is easy. It's getting to the top in the first place that takes brains and effort."

There was a group at the bottom of the hill who appeared to be taking bets on how long I would last before wiping out.

About halfway down a terrifying thought hit me. I didn't know how to stop.

"You forgot to tell me to stop," I screamed nearing the landing strip.

"Bend your knees in," was the response.

Like a knock-kneed chick on I sailed right by the first

group wondering if the steps of the lodge would slow the pair of skis on my shoulder.

Then it happened - a perfect three point landing (hips, shoulders and knees) on the edge of the pond used for making snow.

Still, before the evening was over the runs down bunny hill got to be kind of fun.

Getting back up was something else.

On the way home, Ace bandages still in hand, I began to search for meaning. There had to be something gained besides sore muscles.

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