

Ryan bill turned down SEMOG rejects wider powers

By TIM RICHARD

Leaders of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMOG) are still shy about expanding the seven-county voluntary agency's powers, but they no longer recoil in horror at the idea of taking on new responsibilities.

SEMOG's Executive Committee last week declared "philosophically unacceptable" the so-called Ryan Bill to revamp it. At the same time, it declared its willingness to work with the sponsor, former State House Speaker William Ryan (D-Detroit), to find "changes that will make our work more effective."

And in its debate, the executive committee listened without anger to a bawling out from member Arch Valler, a Schoolcraft College trustee from Plymouth, who declared they were "hiding your heads in the sand" on the issue of regional government.

Last Wednesday's debate was in marked contrast to the reaction of SEMOG leaders to a similar proposal made two years ago. At that time, they had registered immediate and horrified shock at the reform ideas contained in the Ryan bill.

THE RYAN BILL embodies the ideas put forth in "The Papers" of the Metropolitan Research and Education Foundation. Since its birth in 1969, SEMOG has been a voluntary planning agency, wary of attacks that it is a metropolitan government conspiracy, on the one hand, and too weak on the other.

The Ryan Bill proposes:

1. That membership of governments in southeast Michigan be mandatory. SEMOG's regional approach is a criminal justice plan, reaction and

open space plan, sewer and water plan.

2. That SEMOG be governed by a 41-member board, of whom 31 (including a chairman) would be elected by the people. At present, SEMOG's executive committee consists of delegates picked by member governing bodies. SEMOG's statement, "Local elected officials within SEMOG have proven that they can tackle the tough regional issues they face."
3. That a charter be written whereby SEMOG could become an "umbrella" agency coordinating such single-purpose agencies as the metropolitan water board and the Huron-Clinton parties board. SEMOG officials actually liked this idea.

AFTER LARRY MAINLAND, SEMOG's first chairman, stoutly defended the voluntary nature of the organization, Valler took the floor.

"I've been an elected official on a local basis as long as anyone in this room," began Valler, a Plymouth city commissioner and Wayne County supervisor before being elected to the Schoolcraft College board. "I don't agree with the Ryan Bill 100 per cent, but it would be disastrous to ignore its intent—to strengthen an organization like SEMOG."

"I'm concerned with the argument that only elected officials (from local government) can run SEMOG. We kid ourselves when we say we represent the people. When you're planning sewer and water and other things, you need more input. Industry, labor."

"Everyone's worried about regional government. I'd worry, too. If I thought Detroit were going to dominate it, though, Ryan doesn't want to go as far as Nashville or Los Angeles' toward metropolitan government."

LARRY PERNICK, Oakland County commissioner from Southfield and chairman of the SEMOG committee which drafted the statement opposing the Ryan Bill, admitted, "There's a lot to what Arch has said."

"But the committee feels the structures that exist are the best available. We're a young organization. I'd rather see an evolutionary process of structural change than this revolutionary process (in the Ryan Bill)."

The motion to adopt Pernick's committee's report passed with only a single nay—Valler's. An amendment taking a conciliatory tone toward Ryan's general purposes passed with only a scattering of nays—one of them from Fred Houghten, Oakland County board chairman from Rochester.

Several Observer & Eccentric area officials were on the Pernick committee which drafted the report opposing the Ryan Bill. They include: John

Doherty, West Bloomfield Township supervisor; Jerry Raymond, Livonia councilman; Beverly McAlister, Plymouth mayor; Patrick McDonald, Redford Township supervisor, and Homer Case, Bloomfield Township supervisor.

THE REPORT said in part:

"We must be ever vigilant of attempts to impose new levels of authority which widen the gulf between the people and their government without any commensurate gain in service to the people."


"SEMOG has in the past survived attempts to dismantle it by those who believe we are too powerful and that we are opposed to local home rule. Now we are confronted by those who believe we are weak and ineffectual and who seek to transform us into a form of regional government."

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