

# editorial opinion

## A trip to Washington is inspirational time

Careening over the jam-packed expressway overpass, I saw the capital city spread out like a picture out of a textbook.

"Up, it's all here," spouted my brother. "Wait until you get down there and see how big it really is. This is the center of everything."

And so I was about to be introduced to Washington, D.C. Unlike many persons, I always seemed to miss the trip to the nation's capital. I was one of the more rotten paper carriers, unable to persuade enough persons to take the paper so I could win a trip.

As luck would have it, my high school senior class decided traveling to D.C. was unoriginal, so we were tured off to some other nebulous spot. At any rate, that trip to Washington slipped by until my brother landed a job in the Pentagon, of all places. So this summer, I took advantage of the free room and board to see the sights

**TO BE HONEST**, I was bound and determined to remain snugly unimpressed. After all, a monument is a monument is a monument. I told myself

Wrong Washington, D.C. is quite a place. Although I had felt frustrated at being to see the placid until my third decade, I was glad I waited.

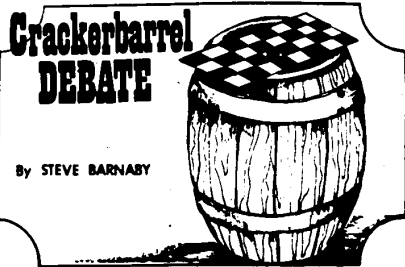
Having shuffled around the community newspaper business for four years proved to be an advantage in enjoying this summer's tour. It all made sense.

Anyone who wants, really wants, to understand how government works—from city hall to international politics—should treat himself to a week or two in Washington.

American government, as I learned, is like a gargantuan jigsaw puzzle. Every piece is critical in making a total picture. If a piece is missing, the puzzle is incomplete and in danger of falling apart.

Too often, persons occupy themselves with only one facet of government. By doing this, they become discouraged. The paper work and unreturned phone calls seem endless. It is introduced into the political machine until it is spit out sometimes seems endless.

But over the last decade, the nation-



al government has learned that working with local branches is a key in solving most problems—and quelling problems at their roots.

The best examples of this are the hundreds of programs wherein the federal government returns money to local units to be used at their discretion. These days, the capital is full of persons from local governmental units seeking aid and giving suggestions on how best to solve problems.

D.C. is an exciting city with a hustle of activity. From dawn until dusk, the streets are packed with cars and government workers going about the nation's business. A person soon realizes the enormity of the proposition.

But in this enormity are the senators and representatives wondering what the folks back home are thinking. If you don't tell them, they'll ask when you give them a visit.

**ALTHOUGH THE** capital is big, you soon realize it's only the tip of an even larger iceberg, the American public.

For those who want to get into the historical scene, Washington, D.C. has plenty to offer. And the best factor is that the best things are free.

Every department has free tours, from the White House and Capitol to the Treasury Department and FBI. If you're really into history, the Smithsonian Institution has more American

memorabilia than you could see in a lifetime.

My favorites, though, were the Lincoln Memorial, Custis-Lee mansion and Arlington Cemetery.

On a clear night, a person can stand in back of the Lincoln Memorial, look across the Potomac and see the Custis-Lee mansion lit up on the hill of Arlington. The mansion, by the way, is where Robert E. Lee lived before the Civil War.

More than any other event, the Civil War demonstrates the strength of this country and the great men who molded it. Although it was a terrible time, it showed we could survive.

Lee, who would have been considered a traitor in most other countries, has been properly memorialized, demonstrating the respect this country has always had for freedom of dissent.

On the other hand, while Lee was from the best of America's founding families, Lincoln, with his determination and wisdom, rose from humble roots to make this country a "more perfect union."

His statue staring down at the thousands who come to honor him each year is a reassuring reminder.

When you stand behind the Lincoln Memorial, gazing up at the Custis-Lee mansion, you'll see a flame quietly flickering in the night. It's the eternal flame over John F. Kennedy's grave. Looking at that, you just know everything will be all right.

by their county boards, who pay little attention to HCMA and rarely call upon HCMA board members to make an accounting of their stewardships. The governor has a million other things to worry about, and pays little attention to how his appointees' work.

In short, HCMA doesn't really answer to anybody, and Hood's bill does nothing to improve the status quo. Hood's bill is just more of the same old politics with a little gerrymandering stirred in.

To be responsible as a regional agency, HCMA ought to report to a regional agency—namely, SEMCOG itself.

After all, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority gets two-thirds of its members from SEMCOG appointments. Why shouldn't HCMA also be answerable to SEMCOG, the official planning agency of the region and an agency which could pay more attention to the metroparks than five isolated county boards of commissioners?

**HOOD'S BILL** would require HCMA to "operate and maintain at least one park . . . in Detroit." It's a nice idea, on paper, but the Legislature has no business meddling in regional affairs in such a specific way.

In fact, HCMA has been negotiating with Detroit Mayor Coleman Young's administration to take over operation of much of Belle Isle, but Young is so extremely jealous of his spending and hiring powers that he said no, he wants HCMA's money instead. HCMA said no way, quite rightly.

So if there's no metropark in Detroit today, it's the fault of a certain grasping Detroit politician—not the HCMA.

**AT THE OUTSET**, it was mentioned that western Wayne County residents failed to register these kinds of objections to the Hood bill at last week's hearing.

Perhaps Oakland County folks will do better. The House committee will hold its hearing Monday, Sept. 29 at 7:30 p.m. in the County Commissioners auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

One bit of advice: If the hearing runs late, have your remarks ready in letter form and hand-deliver it to the committee.

## Eccentricities



Viewers lose in rating game

We're two weeks into the new television season and the rating game is on.

TV executives pondered over vast statistical data to see who watched what last year. The programs with low ratings last year have disappeared from the scene.

The ones with high ratings have been imitated by other networks to the point where the public is subjected to many look-alike shows.

In the race to secure better ratings, the greatest disservice the networks do to their audience is to switch around the time at which a show appears.

**IF ONE NETWORK** has a show that dominates an audience on a particular night, the other networks suffer because the public has a tendency not to switch channels, and one good show can improve the network ratings for the whole night.

The ratings are important because advertisers are willing to pay more for ad time if they believe more people will see the ad.

To counteract a highly rated show, the other networks move one of their own highly rated shows from another night, so that it appears at the same time as the first show. While this has a tendency to reduce the rating of the show moved, it does

steal watchers from the first channel and reduces that show's ratings.

**OVER A PERIOD** of time, the audience is prevented from watching the best shows on television because they appear at the same time as the other best shows on television.

This switching also forces a television watcher to change his watching habits. If the viewer usually watched television only on certain nights of the week, a show that fell on one of these nights last year may now appear on his bowling night or her gourmet cooking class night, so they may simply not watch the TV.

Far be it from me to tell the television industry how to run its business, but they ought to decide who they are trying to please.

**IF THEY IGNORE** the needs of the television viewer by making short-run changes that put money in their pockets, in the long run, the frustrated audience will reduce the amount of time they spend watching television.

They may win a couple of rating wars this year, but they will be hard pressed in the future to raise their ad rates when fewer people are watching television and all ratings go down.

## Observation Point



A novel anti-vandalism idea

Vandalism is one of the biggest problems in the suburbs today, even though it is not much reported by the Detroit newspapers or TV stations.

But at this newspaper we get countless calls complaining about vandalism, and we make a real point of covering the story because we know it is important to people who live here.

Some recent examples: Explorer Scout Post 389 in Farmington Hills has one of the best programs in the area. Included is a band which travels around on a bus, playing concerts and having a good time. It's a first-class band, but a few weeks ago the bus was vandalized to the tune of \$700.

A certain elementary school in Livonia has a hole in nearly every window in the building. School officials have virtually given up insuring against window breakage because it is too expensive; broken panes are simply repaired by school maintenance men.

A Troy resident, harassed by groups of local teenagers throwing loud parties and vandalizing private property, has threatened to move out. "I like Troy," he says, "but, believe me, you can only take so much." He complains about beer bottles thrown on his lawn and human waste thrown into his swimming pool.

FARMINGTON City Public Safety Director Dan Brynes notes that while most crime statistics have gone down in recent months, vandalism is up.

"It's the toughest crime to solve," he says, "because it's done on the run and there's no pattern to it."

No pattern, except one of senseless destruction and theft. Ball bearings shot through tough plate glass windows. Beer cans tossed casually on lawns. Bike thefts, and tape decks taken from cars. Lawn streaking and shouting, especially through sprinkler systems.

Nearly every suburban resident has experienced this kind of vandalism, and most are frustrated and increasingly sore at it.

Local police departments are hard put to find remedies. They cite the randomness of incidence and lack of motive. They also speak resignedly of a breakdown of family discipline, of a failure of

those affected to file complaints, and of a society-wide deterioration of what used to be called morals.

**BUT AT LEAST** one local school district has launched an experiment to reduce vandalism that seems to be working.

Like most school systems in the area, Clarenceville (which includes parts of Livonia, Farmington and Redford Township) had experienced a sharp rise in vandalism over the past several years. But in 1974 Sgt. David McDowell and Business Manager Ed Salisz decided to do something about it.

They included in the district budget for the year \$1 for each child enrolled. The money was set up in a fund for each school, ranging from more than \$1,000 for the high school to \$500 for smaller schools, to be administered by the principal and a student committee.

At the start of school, the committees met and decided what they wanted to do with the fund, from which would be deducted the costs of repairing any vandalism which occurred in the school during the year. One school decided to get a sound projector, another to buy lounge chairs for the entrance hall, and another to plant shade trees in the recreation area.

Then meetings were held in the schools to let the word out that if vandalism costs were kept down the fund could afford to buy what the kids wanted.

**THE RESULTS** for the first year look remarkable—"a substantial reduction in vandalism, around 50 per cent," according to McDowell.

Obviously, the system works through peer pressure and by demonstrating to the kids that vandalism by a few costs them all.

Clarenceville is using the program again this year and McDowell hopes the results will remain good for 1975-76.

It's an interesting idea, and well worth study by other school systems which are troubled with vandalism. And it just might have an effect on vandalism outside the schools by teaching kids that senseless destruction and theft hurt the entire community, as well as themselves, rather than just the house that happens to get ripped off.

## From our readers

### Council members need watching

Editor:

The Farmington Hills City Council meeting of Monday, Sept. 8 might have been a little funny if it were not so serious, especially to those of us who sat through the very long evening.

It was a little funny because advisory questions to be placed on the November ballot were discussed. It appeared that not even the council members had enough information at hand in order to properly word the ques-

tions to be proposed to the public for opinion.

It would appear that this sort of thing would be a good argument for limiting the terms of office of our city officials.

For the past two years, the council has passed on city business by resolution, making it nigh impossible for the public to show its approval by ballot.

Now, when four of the council members (Oppenheimer, Dolan, Descan and Ortman) are running for reelection, they and Mr. McDowell are suddenly very interested in the opinion of their electorate. During the past two years they have not once asked the approval of the voters.

These proposed advisory questions, if passed, would not bind the council

to adopt the measures. Further, because no accurate, nor even fairly accurate estimates are available as to the costs nor the means for funding these proposals, the vote would be meaningless and confusing.

It should be noted that only councilmembers Dudley and Lichtman decided the fact that this facade of concern for the voters is just that, a facade, and had the political integrity to so call it.

One does not have to be a political expert to view these actions as shrewd and opportunistic. Perhaps in the forthcoming election the incumbents should be judged very carefully on the basis of actions such as these.

JODY SOBORNIN  
Farmington Hills

## Metro parks scrutinized

Western Wayne County residents missed the boat last week, but maybe Oakland County's politically astute citizenry will do better.

A special state House of Representatives committee is probing the structure and functions of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA), the five-county agency which gave us the metroparks, notably Kensington and Stony Creek.

At a recent hearing in Westland, Wayne County residents profusely complimented the metropark system but completely overlooked the gist of the committee's inquiry.

Specifically, the committee is looking at a bill by Rep. Morris W. Hood Jr. (D-Detroit)—House Bill 4147, which would unfortunately perpetuate more problems than it would solve. To put it simply but not unfairly, it's another Detroit power grab.

**BY WAY OF** background, HCMA was created in 1940 with a board of seven commissioners—two appointed by the governor and one appointed by each of the five county boards of commissioners. Obviously, the one-person, one-vote system is violated; if someone ever takes HCMA to court, our friends who run the metroparks are going to lose.

Hood's bill would expand board membership to 12, but with a few tricks and twists thrown in:

Wayne County would get five board members, three of whom would have to be from Detroit; Oakland County, three; Macomb, two; Washtenaw and Livingston, one each.

Clearly, the Wayne County suburbs get the short end of the stick: two board members, who each would represent 681,250 persons, Detroit, with almost the same population as the Wayne suburbs, would get three board members, representing 454,186 apiece. (Population figures are from the 1974 report of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.)

**HURON-CLINTON** is finding itself under increasing pressure to pay attention to the scrutinized areas. Unfortunately, Hood's bill does nothing to make the agency itself more responsible.

At present, HCMA's annual report goes to the governor, who probably never looks at it. Individual commissioners are appointed every four years

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