

# The New Boards Of Supervisors

## The Thoughts Of Chairman Zak

By TIM RICHARD

**DETROIT**  
In the same way that Jerome Cavanagh, early in his career as mayor of Detroit, turned to Washington for aid, Albert J. Zak has his eye on Lansing for help in straightening out the costly hydra-headed government of Wayne County.

Zak is the embattled chairman of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors. That is, he was embattled. For a couple of months, the Detroit news media focused a dazzling and critical light on the Zak majority's machinations with salaries, and a recall campaign was started against him and 14 other members. In Zak's case, the folks in Hamtramck would have none of the recall.

Silence but not inactivity. For Al Zak and his people are preparing elaborate justifications for getting more money from the state. They also want to get structural changes in county government short of home rule, which, they fear, will take too long and probably fail to get voter support.

Zak bears an unfortunate (for him) physical resemblance to Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley, everybody's favorite pin-cushion, it seems. Zak also is slow on the draw compared, say, to the rapier-tongued unionist, Paul Silver, a county board member from Detroit.

As a result, Zak has been shy with the press for awhile, but recently he was quite happy to be interviewed on the topics of the newly-reapportioned Board of Supervisors and the role of county government in the last third of the 20th century.

FOR THE SUPERVISORS, Zak first wants to have something akin to the Legislative Service Bureau in Lansing. The county board's "Research Division" would have a

couple of attorneys, a stenographer and a typist. One function would be to help supervisors draft ordinances and resolutions.

Another, more important function, however, would be to study all the boards, departments, commissions and bureaus that make up county government. Zak states the complexity of the problem: "Can we abolish a certain board? That depends. Was it created by a resolution? By an ordinance? By a state law? By the constitution?" The Research Division would find out.

His second desire is to have a county executive. "The general opinion is that it's not necessary to have a home rule charter or a vote of the people," he says.

Like a mayor, a county executive could have a power of veto—perhaps even item veto on budget matters. The executive could be either elected by the voters or appointed by the supervisors—Zak states no preference at this time.

The executive could have the power of appointment over such non-constitutional county offices as controller, parks director, internal auditor, purchasing agent, public works director and so on. Such constitutional offices as county clerk, prosecutor and sheriff, however, would continue to be elective.

**ZAK ISN'T** A creative thinker on questions of county service or taxes. Items:

• Should there be a single county assessor? "I couldn't say whether I'm for or against it." But he favors uniform assessing procedures, at least, between all the cities and townships in the county.

• Should there be a single county police department, instead of the present system of sometimes conflicting local police departments and an overlapping county department? "That's up to the local communities. The Sheriff's Department's road patrol services are decreasing." As more cities incor-



CHAIRMAN ALBERT J. ZAK resembles Chicago's Mayor Daley

(Observer photo by Vince Wick)

porate, Zak thinks the Sheriff's Department might end up providing court officers and running the jail—but refers you for a more definite answer to Sheriff Roman Gribbs.

• Should county services be expanded in any areas? "Before we extend ourselves, if services are demanded, we must first take into consideration the financing of same," he says carefully.

• Well, then, if finances are a problem, should the county be granted greater taxing authority? "At this point, I'm not asking that the county have greater taxing authority. People should have the right to express themselves. . . . I don't think the Board of Supervisors will be granted (greater taxing) authority without a vote of the people."

The answers form a circle. To bolster public confidence in the county, Zak is seeking legislation in Lansing that will earmark \$140 million from the sale of the county's water system to the City of Detroit for city capital improvements. He says this will "keep faith with the voters," who approved the water bond issue years ago.

The proceeds, he suggests, could be used on a youth home, a jail addition, rehabilitation of the old county building, parks—"may be even rapid transit in your neck of the woods," he smiles.

**ZAK AND THE BOARD'S** legislative agent, former State Rep. Joe Sobieski, and budget expert Louis Basso point to a lot of money problems faddled on Wayne County

by the state.

For example, while the county board theoretically has control of the budget, the circuit judges decided they wanted a law research clerk and started a lawsuit to force the county board to make an appropriation. The judges won, and the supervisors saw a court eroding the legislative body's fiscal powers.

For another example, a long-standing state policy is that the county must pay for the first year of care for mental patients. The problem is becoming acute. There are more mental patients today, but they stay in hospitals for shorter periods of time, and they get more intensive (and expensive) care. The county gets socked by the bill. (With institutional rather than personal pride, Zak notes that Wayne County started the first mental hospital in the state.)

For still another example, the state pays \$6 per day for the care of TB patients. But TB care now costs \$40 a day. Zak says the state should pay more.

**ZAK THINKS** THE 26 new district supervisors, who on Jan. 1 replaced a board of 130-plus members representing cities and townships, are less town-minded, more county-minded and harder-working than the previous board.

To balance the budget, the new board froze the filling of 220 new positions, later

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## Oakland's Problems Stem From Detroit--Edwards

By HOWARD KOHN

**PONTIAC**  
Charles Edwards doesn't believe county government needs any more changing.

In fact, Edwards didn't want county government to change in the first place.

Edwards is the first chairman of Oakland County's first board of supervisors apportioned on a one-man, one-vote basis.

"I need this job like a hole in the head," he says. "But I took it because I didn't want some of these young guys to mix it up."

For the first time ever, newcomers to county government dominate the board 17 to 10. Reapportionment reduced board seats from 87 to 27.

"I figured we'd be in a lot of trouble with so many new members on the board," Edwards continues. "But I was wrong. . . they caught on fast. Our meetings have been running twice as long just so they can learn background information."

Edwards is an oddtimer, a 10-year veteran from Madison Heights.

"Being on the old board, I always thought we had the best possible system," he explains, "and I still think we do, even with the reapportionment."

**OAKLAND COUNTY'S RECORD** testifies in favor of that opinion.

On an efficiency criterion, Oakland has been ranked near or in the top 10 U.S. counties for several years. That's out of 3,038 counties—the top two-thirds of one per cent.

However, Oakland is just beginning to face many major metropolitan problems.

A white exodus into the county and black demands from Pontiac's inner city are weighing on the county like barnacles on a ship.

Poverty is increasingly an exacerbating problem. "We've always tried our poor like human beings," Edwards says. "But Pontiac's got an awful lot of colored. . . and they're demanding more attention."

Subdivisions springing up in formerly rural areas are also accenting the need for more and better roads. Because Oakland doesn't have an urban history like Wayne County, it has few paved roads in the outlying reaches.

Edwards blames Detroit's crime rate and racial conflicts for Oakland's white

population boom. "Under the conditions that prevail I'd move out, too," Edwards notes.

He says he lost more than \$100,000 in the 1967 Detroit riot when arsonists burned buildings he owned at Grand River and McGraw.

"Oakland County is getting many people who are fed up with Detroit," he adds. "And we have to provide services for them that take time and money."

**OAKLAND'S PROPOSED** budget for 1969-70 is under attack by liberals who claim "it doesn't satisfy human needs."

Aldo Vagnozzi of Farmington, a spokesman for the 19th District Democratic Party, says Oakland "must stop building palaces and airports and do something for the poor and the mentally and physically handicapped."

Edwards is a Democrat and Democrats hold a 15-12 edge on the board. But Oakland supervisors have a tradition of conservative fiscal policies.

The Office of Economic Opportunity—the War on Poverty's embattled agency—requested \$138,000 from the county. The proposed budget didn't allocate OEO anything.

Edwards says OEO will likely get something, but not that much.

"We're going to set up priorities for spending this summer before we discuss the budget in the fall," he answers. "I realize we've got a lot of work to do."

More than 30 per cent of the proposed budget is slotted for health and welfare needs. But Edwards admits Oakland is lacking in funds, facilities and plans for meeting the overall problem.

"I would like to see more done in mental health, in drug and alcohol control and for indigents," Edwards suggests.

**IF MEETINGS CAN** solve the problems, then Oakland should soon be the number one county in the country.

Edwards is the supervisors committee meeting an average of two or three times a day—with full agendas.

"No board has ever worked as hard as this one," he says.

The 25 standing committees of the old board have been divided into 13 committees, and several supervisors are doubling and tripling up on committee assignments.



CHARLES EDWARDS didn't want the new Oakland supervisors to "crap it up."

But Edwards thinks the governmental structure can juggle the problems of the 20th and 21st centuries. He opposes remodeling ideas of some political revisionists.

County home rule would take the power out of the hands of the people and give it to administrators," he argues, "and a metropolitan government would eliminate boundaries that should be maintained."

"Big government gives a small minority a chance to build an empire which can't be toppled," he reasons. "That's what the American Revolution was all about."

**EDWARDS ORIGINALLY** voted against Oakland's involvement in SEMCOG, a regional voluntary cooperative unit. Now he says, "It has a place as long as it doesn't try to be too powerful."

"SEMCOG's study on transportation, for example, was very helpful. But I think it should have just advisory powers."

Edwards does support one change in county government.

He believes the chairman's term should be extended from one year to two.

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