

editorial opinion

Tax reform action needed, quickly

It's time for voters and state legislators to grow up.

Every day reports on the future of school districts around the state grow bleaker. Yet, the state legislators sit on their hands while voters obstinately protest the present formula for paying the education bill by turning down millage requests.

State Superintendent of Instruction John Porter laid it on the line recently when he said the bottom will fall out of the state's education system by 1980 if something isn't done to reform the system.

Voters around the state are up in arms over the increase in their property taxes. Voters in the Farmington school district have caught the fever by turning down the district's most recent millage request.

Even though voters are sending a message to Lansing, nothing is produced but a lot of hot air from the state lawmakers. Everybody agrees the



system must be changed, but no one has come up with any ideas.

MEANWHILE, THE KIDS SUFFER. Numerous teachers have been laid off, leaving students faced with teachers who don't even know much about the subject.

It's bad news, and it could get worse. Look at schools in Pinconning, Cheboygan and in the Keleva-Norman-Dixon district of Manistee County. Voters refused to renew the entire millage package for the their children's education.

That's plain stupid.

Many voters, property owners in particular, have developed a sick attitude as far as education is concerned.

They think that by refusing millage renewals and increases, they are getting even with the tax system.

Nonsense. All they're doing is cutting their own kids' throats, not to mention the fact that they're contributing to the erosion of their own community.

Sure, the system needs to be changed. Another method of financing education needs to be found. But it's the height of stupidity to cut off your nose to spite your face. And what an ugly face we're all getting by being so obstinate.

The high price of litter

The Litter Lobby—those businesses and unions who make money from throwaways—will stoop to nothing in their efforts to block voter approval of Proposal A, which would ban throwaway beverage cans and bottles.

With slick, expensive radio commercials, the Litter Lobby, which calls itself "Committee Against Forced Deposits," is telling folks the prices of pop and beer will soar if Proposal A is passed Nov. 2. The Litter Lobby is wrong for many reasons.

• Pop and beer prices will not be raised because of a ban on throwaways. Rather, you would pay a deposit once and get your money back when you return the bottles, or if you buy more beverages, the bottles you return will cover the deposit on the bottles you take out. The Litter Lobby is telling a shopper again by scaring folks with that high price talk.

• The cost of having throwaway cans and bottles is not zero. Smashed bottles on roads harm tires. Broken bottles and rusted cans on freeways and in parks hurt kids and pets. Litter along rural roads is a hazard to farm implements, truck tires, livestock and crops.

Those costs aren't reflected in the prices of pop and beer, but they are reflected in medical costs, in veterinarians' costs, in road maintenance costs, in auto owners' costs, in homeowners' costs, in farmers' costs.

• Litter generates more litter. When slobbs throw away a "non-returnable" or "convenience" can or bottle, it weakens everybody's respect for a clean environment.

Having throwaway cans and bottles is a luxury Michigan can no longer afford. By passing Proposal A Nov. 2, we can ban those throwaways. Don't let those expensive commercials about "forced deposits" trick you.

If you, too, are outraged at the Litter Lobby, there are many organizations you can join to fight for passage of Proposal A.

One is a local affiliate of Michigan United Conservation Clubs, which spearheaded the drive to put the proposal on the ballot. It is basically a hunting- and fishing-oriented group.

Another is East Michigan Environmental Action Council, One Northfield Plaza, Troy. Call Betty Wolfe, volunteer coordinator, at 879-6040.



Throwaways are a luxury we can no longer afford. (Staff photo)

SEMTA: Camel, platypus and wombat

On balance, the Michigan Legislature did the right thing in giving the Southern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) power to raise \$125 million a year toward a rapid transit system.

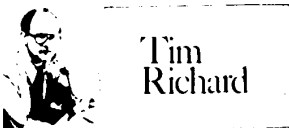
But the way the legislature "restructured" the regional transit system's board must make one shudder. If a camel is a horse designed by a comic matter, then the new SEMTA board is the offspring of a camel, a duck-billed platypus and a wombat.

Since the board was established in 1968, the selection system has been fairly rational. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments picked six members and the governor three.

OAKLAND AND WESTERN WAYNE counties, in particular, get a raw deal from the "restructuring."

Consider Detroit gets five members on the new 15-member SEMTA board. All are appointed by the mayor—but not subject to confirmation by the city council. That's poor procedure, but that's what Mayor Coleman A. Young wants.

Oakland County has an executive. But does the Oakland County executive get to appoint the county's three SEMTA board members? No. One is picked by the county board of commissioners and two by SEMCOG County Executive Dan Murphy. Thanks to the new formula is a snub to Oakland's pioneering work with the executive system, and he's



absolutely right. What's sauce for Detroit ought to be sauce for Oakland County, too.

The "restructuring" would have made far more sense had the county executive been given the power of appointment subject to confirmation by the county board.

OAKLAND GETS a bad deal another way. The weirdos in Macomb County have been too provincial to join SEMCOG. So the legislature actually awarded this provinciality, this civic isolationism, by allowing the Macomb County board to appoint both of Macomb's SEMTA board members.

But the good guys in Oakland, who have remained loyal to SEMCOG, get kicked in the chops because Oakland County gets to make only one of its SEMTA appointments itself, the other two Oakland seats will be filled through the SEMCOG process.

That's patently unfair on the face of it, Oakland gets punished, not rewarded, for its regional participation in SEMCOG.

WESTERN WAYNE County gets a bad deal on apportionment.

Detroit, with a population of 13 million, gets five SEMTA board seats. The rest of Wayne County, with a population of 12 million, gets only three SEMTA board seats.

In case you're weak on math, it figures out to one SEMTA board seat for every 250,000 Detroiters and one for every 400,000 suburban Wayne County residents. "One person, one vote." Not when it comes to building a multi-billion dollar rapid transit system!

But perhaps western Wayne should be thankful for small favors. Right now those 12 million suburbanites have absolutely no one on the board, and haven't in two years.

AFI-GO President William Marshall of Taylor, had to quit two years ago. Gov. Milliken dawdled for more than a year, then appointed ad man Thomas B. Adams of Bloomfield Hills to fill the vacancy. Adams resigned without ever having attended a meeting.

Milliken dawdled another year and then filled the post with Dwight Havens—who happens to be president of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce.

Suburban Wayne County was shafted again

Issues, not character, should decide

I wish the presidential election were over. I am tired of hearing about lusty and television blunders because they don't go to the heart of which man can do the best job of leading the nation.

Show me a man who doesn't lust and I'll show you a man who has some mental or physical ailment.

Show me a man who appears before millions on television and doesn't make a mistake and I'll show you a man who hasn't said anything of importance.

It is said that this election will be determined by the character of the candidates and not the issues involved. If this is true, it is not very satisfying to the American people because Democratic pollster Hart says that fewer than half of the American registered voters will vote Nov. 2. This hasn't happened since the 1924 Coolidge-Davis contest.

WHY ARE THE American people turned off? Because they are looking for answers, and they are frustrated by what they are hearing.

They want to know from the candidates how they stand in solving the problems of crime in the streets, inflation, unemployment and what is going to happen to their taxes.



H. ARI W. HOCH, JR.

I ran across a quotation by a British historian, Prof. Alexander Tyler:

"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largesse from the public treasury."

"From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses under loose fiscal policy, always followed by a dictatorship."

"The average age of the world's greatest civilizations has been 200 years."

THE INTERESTING THING is that Prof. Tyler

made this statement more than 200 years ago. And, of course, we have just celebrated our 200th birthday this summer.

Can the United States be the single exception among democracies which have risen to power and excellence and then lost their democratic heritage?

The current signs are not good. Twenty years ago we stood alone and unchallenged as the richest and most powerful nation on the earth. The average citizen of this country was the envy of the world, with more personal freedom and more material possessions than ever had been dreamed possible.

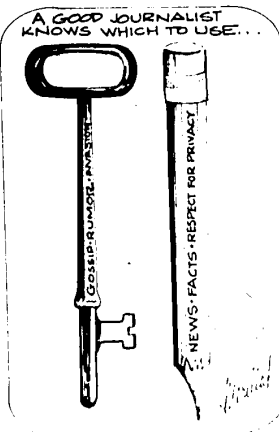
Today the average citizen is frustrated, disillusioned and angry at our institutions, which he perceives as controlling the destiny of the nation.

THE AMERICAN CITIZEN wants his country to be No. 1, wants to be proud of it and is desperately looking for leadership to bring his country back to its position of eminence and bring his own life back to where it is safe to walk the streets at night and be able to save a little money to put his kids through college in the future.

It's about time the candidates face these issues. America did not become strong with unbalanced budgets and federally created jobs. America can't remain strong by playing Robin Hood and continually increasing the taxes on the wealthy and business to help the poor, because those nations which have tried this have found that business without incentive does not grow. And business that does not grow deteriorates.

Let's not make this an election based on character, but an election based on issues.

Let us, as voters, not be so egotistical as to say that no man deserves our vote, but instead force the candidates to take positions that will build our country, solve our internal problems and again make us unchallenged as the richest and most powerful nation on earth.



Observation Point

By PHILIP H. POWER



Press feeding on gossip

One of the biggest topics of local political-journalistic gossip in the past few days has been the feud going on between the editors of the Detroit News and their columnist, TV commentator Lou Gordon.

In recent weeks they have been arguing with charitable gusto might and main over the race for the U.S. Senate between Don Riegle and Mary Eisch.

The News ran a series of news stories critical of Riegle; he allegedly signed his wife's name to their joint tax return and kept the refund until she asked him for it, he was ranked by national columnist Jack Anderson as among the worst members of the Congress, according to a poll of members and staffers, and he supposedly has taken a position in support of busing to integrate schools.

The News then followed these stories up with a strong editorial arguing that these were reasons why Eisch should be elected to the Senate.

GORDON replied in a column in the News where he has a regular slot.

He claimed that the tax return story was cooked up to embarrass Riegle just at election time, that Jack Anderson himself had not conducted the congressional popularity poll himself, and in fact would vote for Riegle if he lived in Michigan, and that Riegle was just as much against busing as anybody else.

Gordon also said some nasty things about the News' editorial ethics, suggesting that the paper consciously was slanting its news coverage of the campaign to correspond to its previously determined editorial views.

The News then replied to the amazement of many, to Gordon in an editorial of its own. It called him some nasty names and said some disparaging things about his own ethics as a news man.

WHAT IS really going on here, aside from a long standing battle between Gordon and the News (which boasts the TV ratings for one and the circulation of the other is a violation of an old unwritten rule of journalism: Thou shalt not comment, in print at least, on the competency or ethics of another journalist).

And what, in turn, is behind this is a serious and troubling problem beginning to affect American journalism.

Ever since its great success in Watergate our journalism has concentrated increasingly on "going behind" the facade of public statements. Journalists have started to zero in on private lives of public figures, often without taste or real public service. Did President Ford, while a Congressman, ever play golf as the weekend guest of somebody who was an executive with U.S. Steel? (Can anybody, especially a senior Congressman, really be bought by a golfing weekend?) Did Gov. Carter really fly around Georgia in planes owned by textile companies? (Unless there is evidence that Carter favored inappropriately the textile interests while he was governor, does anybody care?)

Gossip has replaced news, fact has become subordinate to rumor, the legitimate needs of public figures for some respect for their privacy has been forgotten.

And then, with no more dirt to pull out on public figures, the press in its ravaging need to keep critical, aggressive and fully investigatory now starts criticizing itself in print.

I'M NOT suggesting that the press itself should be off limits to criticism, nor am I suggesting that members of the press should not attack obvious ineptitudes by other press people.

What I am saying is that the press runs the great risk, in its current fashionable need for gossip and criticism, of destroying its own credibility with the public.

It's like the giant in the fairy tale. He grew so great by devouring his own opponents and his appetite so undiminished that he finally began to feed on himself and so died.

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