editorial opinion

Proposal C's support gave lawmakers lesson

Let the person who thinks his vote doesn't count take heed. Though Proposal C lost at Michigan polls in early November, most Michigan legislators view the loss as a victory. In other words, Michigan voters who wanted to see a limit on taxation sent a message to Lansing that was heard loud and clear.

Speaker of the House Bobby Crim (D-Davison) was in town earlier this week and said "the approach (of Proposal C) was wrong," but, "C wasn't defeated."

Crim was right. The approach of Proposal C, which aimed to limit state taxes, was erroneous. It was the classic example of the doctor treating the symptom and not the disease.

But the real value of Proposal C was in making legislators who depend on the electorate for their jobs more aware of the disease — inefficient spending.

STATE GOVERNMENT does not know how to spend taxpayers' hard-earned dollars in a wise manner.

But, if Crim can be taken at his word, state lawmakers are going to be keeping a watchful eye on our state bureaucrats and where the money goes.

There are three ways in which the legislature can effectively monitor the state budget — zero-base budgeting, sunset laws and budget stabilization.

Zero-base budgeting is an effective tool in that it makes state department heads directly responsible on a year-to-year basis for expenditures in their department.

UNDER A ZERO-BASE system, those department chiefs must justify this year's expenditures before getting more money for next year.

Crim said that within two years Michigan will have a good zero-base budget structure.

Sunset laws hit bureaucracy where it hurts.

They require that state agencies and programs be reviewed on a regular basis by the legislature. If the lawmakers review and approve the program, it continues until its next regular review.

But, if legislators do not review the program, it automatically lapses and dies along with the spending that keeps it alive.

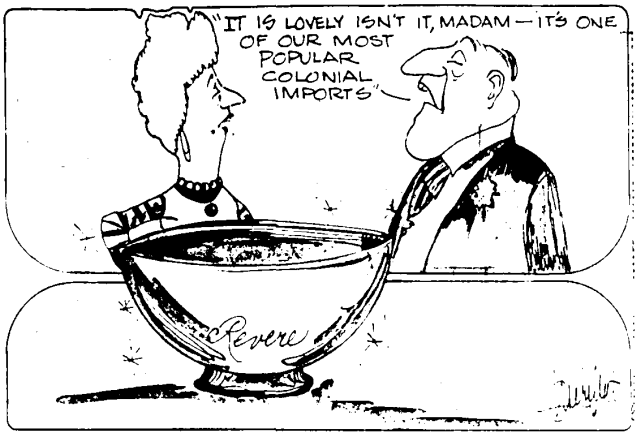
PROBABLY THE MOST effective of the three expense monitoring systems is budget stabilization.

The concept of budget stabilization is to set aside excess revenue in good years as a contingency for bad economic years in the state. This is an especially sound concept for Michigan, because, according to Crim, this state has more economic peaks and valleys than others.

Crim said budget stabilization will be on the Michigan ballot in 1978 in the form of a constitutional amendment.

Hopefully, our state lawmakers have heard the message that those who voted for Proposal C were trying to get across.

Hopefully they will utilize all the tools at their disposal — zero-base-budgeting, sunset laws and budget stabilization — to hamstring Lansing's quick-on-the-draw, fast-spending bureaucrats.



Detroit's capital

A green field for autos

Tim Richard

Here's a conversation starter for a lull in the holiday cocktail party: Why did the automobile industry become concentrated in southeastern Michigan around the time of World War I?

You'll get the schoolbook answers first: Access to water transportation. A mid-point between the coal of the east and the iron of the upper Great Lakes. The presence of Henry Ford. A lot of engineers.

The truth is that southeast Michigan—specifically, Detroit—was far from unique in possessing those advantages. As of 1917, there were 184 auto companies scattered across the nation, and only 25 per cent of all cars were made in Michigan—and many of those in outstate cities.

THE ANSWER to why auto production became concentrated here is in the late Willis F. Dunbar's "Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State"—fine reading and a good Christmas gift still.

There was a great deal of capital in Detroit, gained largely from lumbering and mining, which its owners were willing to invest in automobile-manufacturing facilities. It was difficult to persuade Eastern bankers to invest in what was regarded as a risky enterprise in the early years. These appear to be some of the reasons that Detroit and Michigan early became the focal point for automotive development and production.

"A great deal of capital," the man said. I couldn't remember being taught that in school. I wondered if Prof. Dunbar wasn't engaging in one of the wild generalizations historians often make.

THEN A FRIEND stumbled onto a rare volume you can't buy any more—the 1914 edition of "The Book of Detroiters," edited by Albert Nelson Marquis.

It's kind of a "Who's Who" of that era but devoted mainly to the rich and the publicity seekers, since Henry Ford isn't mentioned.

Consider the listing of Russell A. Alger Jr. (b. 1873): First a wholesale manufacturer of lumber, then a vice-president of Packard Motor Car Co.

His brother, Fred M. Alger (b. 1876), the father of the Republican politician of the 1940s and '50s: Fred Sr. was a director of Alger, Smith & Co., lumber manufacturers, and a director of Manistique Lumbering Co. before becoming a director of Packard and of Anderson Forge and Machine.

Henry B. Joy (b. 1864) was an office boy, then a clerk, then went into the mining business in Utah from 1887-89, and later became president of Packard.

Samuel L. Smith made a fortune in lumbering and furnished funds to organize Olds Motor Works in 1899.

John Kelsey (b. 1866) worked for paper and lumber companies and finally became president of Kelsey Wheel Co., a familiar name.

Allen H. Zacharias (b. 1875) retired in 1908 from the coal business; later he organized Detroit Pressed Steel Co., makers of auto frames and heavy stampings.

Dunbar was right, it seems. Auto companies required capital, and Detroiters had capital.

IT'S NOT FASHIONABLE to say nice things about capital . . . big money . . . the interests. Not in Reuthertown. But on a newspaper you can get away with being unfashionable.

If America became the world's most muscular economic power, it had less to do with the egalitarianism of Jefferson and Jackson than with the policies of Treasury Secretary Hamilton, who got the Revolutionary War debts paid off and gave the fledgling nation a credit rating in Europe that attracted vast amounts of capital.

So when Bob Crachit offers a Christmas toast to his employer, read your history before you join Mrs. Crachit in sneering, "Mr. Scrooge, indeed!"

A sick industry finds itself sicker

"Depression" is not too strong a word to describe the state of the construction in metropolitan Detroit. In the depression of the 1930s, unemployment hit 25 per cent, which is the current level of joblessness among construction workers in this tri-county area.

Yet a construction executive, speaking to the Detroit Economic Club, tells us that residential construction costs rose one per cent a month in the last year. That's 12 per cent for the year. That's double-digit inflation.

Is it any wonder, then, that the construction industry is depressed? Isn't the plain truth that the industry has simply priced itself out of the market?

Here is an industry where labor led the way in gouging out big wage increases in the 1960s, and where management joined in by showing a pronounced preference for building a few units at high prices rather than many units at low prices.

If you want to find a bitter person, talk to anyone who has shopped for a single-family detached dwelling in the suburbs. The construction industry has few admirers among house buyers.

Buyers have many alternatives. Couples can go to rental units or to the pre-fab housing known as "mobile" homes. They can refrain from having children. Industrialists can expand in other states instead of southeast Michigan. Other businesses can expand their old facilities or remodel rather than build new shops.

No one—not even Jimmy Carter and a friendly Congress—can veto the law of supply and demand. It is hard to find tears to shed for the construction industry.

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If Revere had been too busy to ride out for his country...

Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

Suppose when they asked Paul Revere to ride and sound the alarm that night in April of '75, he said he couldn't do it right away because he had a silver bowl he had to finish for one of his customers.

Suppose he had said, "Government and politics need citizen participation, but my business has to come first."

Suppose when John Hancock called the Continental Congress into session on June 7 in '76, it had been a Saturday and a quorum of the delegates hadn't shown up because they were doing things with their families as all good fathers should do on the weekend.

Of course, had that happened, Thomas Jefferson would not have been commissioned to draft the Declaration of Independence.

Suppose Nathan Hale had said that politics are dirty and no self-respecting man would want to get mixed up with those rascals in government who are always fattening their pockets at the expense of the citizens.

He would not have been executed in September of '76, nor would he have had the occasion to say, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country," which became a rallying cry for the Revolutionary War.

SUPPOSE ON CHRISTMAS day in '76 George Washington had decided to celebrate the holiday with his family in Virginia instead of crossing the Delaware, leading to the defeat of the Hessians at Trenton on Dec. 26, the turning point of the Revolutionary War.

Suppose Abraham Lincoln felt that he could make more money practicing law in the private sector than submitting himself to the public for election to public office, because everyone believes that it is not the best man who wins, but the politician who wins, so why try?

Suppose Lincoln had been discouraged from seeking further public office by his early defeats at the polls.

The United States is a democracy today because many of its citizens have given their time and even their lives to make it happen.

LINCOLN SAID, "I go for all sharing of the privileges of government who assist in bearing its burdens." If good men and women are unwilling to involve themselves in government because it takes time away from the family, then their families will probably not live under a government that is free or responsive to the needs of its citizens.

If good and moral men are afraid to involve themselves in government because it is dirty, then government has no chance to be moral or effective because it will be run by those who are willing to spend the time and submit themselves to the judgment of the electorate.

No one should really criticize the way government operates until he first is willing to contribute to its betterment by involving himself.

Growing up too fast

The grieving child-as-adult learned lessons

Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER

Some guy on the desk at the Associated Press had the right idea.

Last Sunday was the 21st birthday of Mary Vecchio, so let's run a piece on what has happened to Mary since 1970. Good idea? Let's go.

You don't remember who Mary Vecchio is or why her 21st birthday is important? Well, neither did I—until I read the rest of the story.

Mary Vecchio is the girl who appeared sobbing, arms upraised in grief and disbelief, in the famous photograph of one of the kids shot during the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations at Kent State University in 1970.

Her story is one that would sound familiar to many families in these suburbs whose kids were in their teens in the late 1960s and early '70s.

MARY WAS RAISED in a comfortable suburb, Opa Locka, in California. One of six children. Father a strict disciplinarian, a port authority foreman. School not so good, so Mary dropped out and split. "Ran away" is a better term.

It seems, though, that she ran to get away from home rather than to get into radical politics. Evidently she just drifted from place to place for awhile, winding up at Kent State. There, the 14-year-old girl from the suburbs suddenly encountered a death she hadn't anticipated and a photographic notoriety she didn't need.

The anti-war movement. The counter-culture. Hippies. Haight-Ashbury. Dope and LSD and uppers and downers.

That seems like a long time ago, back in 1970 when the Ohio National Guard opened fire on campus demonstrators. But it is only six years.

BACK THEN AT THIS newspaper, we kept getting frantic calls from parents whose son or daughter had run off. They would ask us for advice about how to get in touch, which papers they could put a want ad in, how other parents had handled the same situation. When the phone rang, you'd die inside a little more, because you knew you couldn't do much of anything.

We were covering anti-war demonstrations at Schoolcraft College, terrorist-mischievous bombings at Oakland Community College, disputes over dress and hair regulations in local high schools. We worried about whether our reporters and editors were too old to get in touch with the kids they were covering.

It was a strange and peculiar time, when 14-year-olds were suddenly major news sources, making the breaking stories. And when their parents or their teachers or coaches—whom you might have expected to be news makers—were instead only confused and frightened onlookers.

TODAY, OF COURSE, times are different. Kids are still running away from home or taking drugs or participating in demonstrations, but the frequency and intensity have gone down remarkably.

It would be nice to report that Mary Vecchio went straight after her brush with the real world that no 14-year-old newsmaker can ever imagine. But I can't do that.

Evidently there were hard times. Traveling aimlessly back and forth across the country. A no-contest plea to a charge of prostitution and massaging without a license in Miami.

But it's not all bad. She's living with a family in a suburb. She's lost around 100 pounds. She doesn't have so many nightmares; and she is thinking about enrolling in a local community college.

REALITY IS HARD, for everybody involved.

For kids, caught in an absurd situation, where freedom's goal conflicted directly with a bad home life and an unresponsive society, the process of growing up from 14 to 22 took only one or two years. And cost 30.

For parents, puzzled and horrified at what tensions existed between their hard-won world and the rages of their children, the wrench came as they became onlookers while their children became news events.

For the suburbs, it was a time of terrific strain. The kids who were running away or dropping out or taking dope were voting with their feet against a way of life which the times asked them to judge when they were only still in their early teens.

They judged it, in some ways accurately and in other ways inaccurately. But with their judgment and the shock waves that process set off in their parents' hearts and their community's head, they ended the age of innocence of the suburbs.

Now all parties are growing up. The kids, evidently, are gradually going back to school, increasingly suspicious of dope (though still drinking). The parents are a little more sensitive to the absurdities of their society. And the society is a little more understanding that you simply cannot place a population under the kinds of stresses as occurred in the late 1960s without hearing something snap.

Looking at the re-run of the picture of Mary Vecchio, the grieving child as adult, I cannot help but hope that we all have learned lessons we won't forget. I doubt it!