

# OBSERVATION POINT

# DISSENT

## Time To Replace Property Tax

By Philip H. Power

Like most of you reading this column, I got socked with a property tax increase this year.

It wasn't a tax increase the people had voted. Nor was it one that any of our city councils, township boards or boards of education had voted.

And it wasn't a tax increase caused by the higher profits, higher salaries and wages, or higher rents that any of us may have earned.

The tax increase was caused by inflation.

To put it simply, the price of property is rising during this period of inflation. So we're getting hit by higher valuations on our property.

TWO FACTORS determine our tax bills. One is the tax rate set by the voters or the council or governing body -- the number of mills. The other factor is the tax base -- the valuation put on our homes and businesses.

The majority of people have done well enough in this economy that we can take the tax hike in stride. But a lot of people -- mainly retirees and pensioners -- have fixed incomes. They're hit, and hit hard.

A lot of people are acting surprised that taxes are going up in places where no one in government or out voted for them. But we shouldn't be surprised.

The state constitution that went into effect in 1964 provides that property shall be assessed at half its actual cash value. That ties our taxes to the general rise in prices -- inflation.

If you'll think back to the early 1960s, one of the things school people, in particular, were worried about was that costs, teachers' wages and other items on the

expenditure side were rising with the price level, but tax revenues weren't. At fault, they said, was the static level of assessments.

The constitution was written to help them. If our property valuations were tied to the price level, it was reasoned, then revenues could rise automatically, the same as costs.

NOW, THAT kind of reasoning is all right IF you start with the assumption that the property tax is fair in the first place.

The trouble, however, is that it isn't fair in an industrial and service-oriented society. It may have been fair in an agricultural era when the amount of property a man owned was a pretty good indication of his ability to pay taxes. That simply isn't true any more.

A lot of things are being suggested to ease this burden of rising property taxes on people with fixed incomes. Generally, the proposals are well-meaning.

One is to raise the exemptions the older folks get by raising the top limit of the homestead that's eligible for an exemption. At present, a house of up to \$10,000 valuation is eligible, and some want to raise that figure to \$12,500 or even \$15,000.

Others say we shouldn't tie our system of valuing property so closely to the swinging values of the marketplace.

But both of those suggestions miss the point.

What on earth good does it do to raise the older folks' exemptions this year? In a couple of years, we'll have to do it all over again, when prices on property have gone up again.

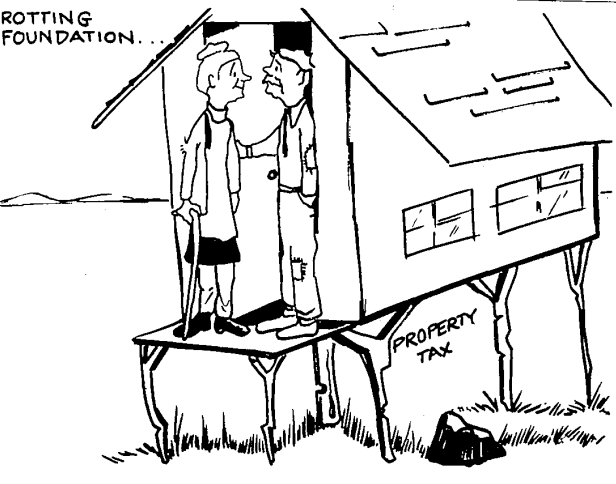
The fault lies with the property tax itself. No amount of reforming will ever correct the basic fault -- that it simply doesn't measure a person's ability to pay.

Gov. Milliken wants to collect the property tax on a statewide basis. The proposal has some merit, because it would equalize educational opportunity for all kids everywhere in this state.

BUT IT'S only a quarter-way measure. We've got to junk the property tax and replace it with a tax that is economically realistic.

That means going to an income tax in one form or another. When our incomes -- that is, our resources for paying taxes -- rise, then the taxes will rise with them. And vice-versa.

The property tax is a patchwork tax right now, and more patches won't help.



Dennis L. Pajot writes

## Bemoans Lack Of Interest

How many people in Observerland can travel to the Metropolitan Opera in New York City?

How many here can discuss obscenity law with its foremost authority in his New York law office?

How many can travel, at the most, 15 miles to the campus of Schoolcraft Community College to engage in presentations of the college Humanities Series lectures, films and concerts.

Most of the college district -- Plymouth, Northville, Livonia, Garden City and Clarenceville -- is obviously ignoring these bits of world-recognized excellence when they appear locally.

It's probably much too much to expect throngs of suburbanites to inundate the Schoolcraft campus for these events. After all, there are dozens of other things to do in life.

But it does seem that more than a 200-person audience should be realistic from a supposedly sophisticated community of almost 200,000 persons.

THEY SAY SUBURBIA is child oriented. This is borne out by the fact that the largest audience drawn to a humanities series event was about 350 to hear Dr. Benjamin Spock, author of books that influenced a whole generation of child rearing and a noted draft protester.

Less than 200 heard Michigan Senator Philip A. Hart, probably the state's most influential politician, speak on the draft and assorted other "people" issues late last year.

About 200 ventured to the spacious, handsome campus (ample parking spaces) to hear the lawyer whose efforts to clear books from obscenity censorship spawned the speculation that "dirty books" are causing a revolution in sexuality.

Top flight musicians, poets and scientists have similarly been ignored by the predominant and ----- public. (Fill in the blank as it best suits your case.)

NOTABLY ABSENT from the presentation on obscenity law were vested interests in the written word as Schoolcraft's own trustees and administrators, newspaper editors and publishers, city councilmen and mayors (especially those currently faced with decisions on this subject) and members of the legal profession.

Members of the Schoolcraft faculty, notably those who last year took the liberal stand on an obscenity poster controversy were notably in attendance.

Mrs. John M. LaRue, wife of a Schoolcraft trustee, did attend.

Two newspapermen sent reporters; one was an advertising department manager, who taped the session presumably for another staff member to prepare into a news editorial.

This editorial doesn't advocate that anyone be expected to that position as opposed to an entire generation within a community being confronted with the spectre of a life time with a monkey on their back.

It does pose the question: what's keeping you away?

- Dennis L. Pajot

## Charges A 'Bad' Rap

SPORTS EDITOR:

After reading your column "Should MHSAA Govern Activities of Eight Year Olds?" it is apparent that you lack a fundamental understanding of amateur and scholastic hockey programs in the State. Of greater concern, however, is that you have voiced some rather strong opinions which are based on half-truths and inadequate research.

Your unprofessional approach lends an air of spectacularism to a situation, that viewed in proper context, generates little news value.

First, you compare the number of games played in one sport vis-a-vis another without consideration of the variable length of each sports' season. The Mavericks (the team alluded to in your column) played 37 games during four months of 1969, which breaks down to 2.2 games per week, not three or four games per week as you have alleged.

The Mavericks are not an "independent," but are members of the Tri-County hockey league. Eighteen league games are played over a five-month period under the auspices of the Michigan Amateur Hockey Association. Other games played are scrimmages, or in tournaments. In hockey, unlike some other sports such as football where a disproportionate amount of time is utilized in practice sessions, scrimmage games are often played in lieu of practice sessions.

Particularly disturbing is your erroneous characterization of the team manager. The team manager and coaches are fine men who have excellent rapport with the boys and enjoy their full respect. These gentlemen exercise prudence and good judgment concerning the boys' health and well being.

The "selfish adults" who are "pushing" their children are actually a group of devoted parents giving generously of time, effort and money to assure that their boys can do that which pleases them most, i.e. play hockey.

I am sure that the Morgans, Smiths and Williams, the other area Mavericks parents join with me and my wife in enthusiastically endorsing our boys, their manager, coaches and team.

In conclusion, I view your column as an uninformed condemnation of not just a specific team but of the many teams, managers, coaches and parents who actively participate and support amateur hockey in Michigan.

HARRY R. LASCHEN  
Livonia

## Dan McCosh writes It's Hard To Believe -- Schools Kill Latin

"Tempus fugit," time flies. The phrase has a nostalgic ring to it -- probably because it is the only thing most people remember from high school Latin.

It was supposed to be good discipline, good for the mind, make you understand the roots of English, teach you how to study. But Latin is a dead language, and it appears the role it played as the cod-liver oil of the high school curriculum is about over.

Because Latin is dead, at least in the Redford Union school district, as a subject as well as a language.

THE DEATH OF LATIN as a high-school subject illustrated a change that has taken place in the system. At the beginning of the decade, it was a required course for admission to many colleges and was a significant subject for the district language program.

Today, although the course is theoretically offered, not enough students at Redford Union have signed up to fill a class, and it

wasn't even taught this year.

What killed Latin? It was the victim of the new emphasis on "relevant" languages -- languages that might actually be used by the student. While Latin was dying, the district was adding other languages, particularly German, and the other "spoken" foreign language courses were extended.

Now it is possible to take as many as six years of a foreign language, beginning as early as elementary school.

In one way, the change in the language program illustrates the change in the whole curriculum -- expanded, lengthened and specialized, with some areas which are not deemed "irrelevant" either emphasized or eliminated completely.

But with the death of Latin, something else died. That was a definition of scholarship as learning, all there is to know about something that is of no use whatsoever.

And that was good for the soul.

## A Guest Editorial

REPRINT FROM ANN ARBOR NEWS

By the looks of things, voters may confront as many as three proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot next November. There really ought to be a fourth.

Michigan needs to establish a clear line of succession to the governorship, one that will cover the kind of situation the state found itself in recently. The No. 2 spot, the lieutenant governorship is vacant and so it will remain until the next election.

This is even more a matter of

urgency because of the leadership gap in Michigan politics which is present right now, whether you know it or not.

Gov. Milliken was vacationing in the Virgin Islands. Since we have no lieutenant governor, the job of acting governor passes to Secretary of State James Hare. But Hare also was outside the state. That meant Atty. Gen. Frank Kelley was acting governor.

KELLEY'S IS THE LAST post in the line of succession. After Kelley, it's anybody's guess. So if Kelley is called out of state or something happens to him, Michigan is caught without a governor.

Michigan has an acting lieutenant governor (Sen. Thomas F. Schweigert of Potoski) who was named to that job by the Senate but the constitution does not confer on him any authority to act as governor. Schweigert nominally fills the post held by Milliken under the Romney governorship.

This mini-crisis probably will pass unnoticed. But one of these days, the state could be caught short. If it's important to set up a line of succession, it's just as important to provide for the filling of vacancies in that line as they arise.

We need to have stand-ins who have the authority by the constitution -- not by some informal political arrangement -- to be governor in as complete a sense as is necessary to the occasion.

## Women Power

Chivalry is not dead yet -- at least not in the 15th District of the Democratic Party.

The fairer sex received some economic advantages during the weekend's Democratic Party political reform convention in Detroit.

While 15th District delegates were discussing changes in the party structure to have more women serve in party offices, it was announced that admission to a hospitality suite would be \$3 each for men and \$1 each for women.

There was some grumbling about women paying their "fair share" if they want more political power within the Democratic Party.

But the money issue triggered a number of smiles on the faces of male delegates who intended to treat their female counterparts to the hospitality suite in the Detroit Hilton Hotel.

Leonard Pogor

## Editorial & Opinion

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