

OBSERVATION POINT

Does It Have To Be Super-Government?

By Philip H. Power



In his recent "State of the Region" address, Metropolitan Fund, Inc.'s President, Kent Mathewson, makes two points crucial to us in the suburbs:

1) Regional problems demand regional solutions that go beyond the typical parochialism of the past. Southfield may pass a model local air pollution control ordinance, but that isn't going to stop fumes floating up the expressway from the River Rouge plant.

2) Old ways of looking at local government aren't going to be enough to solve the problems of today and tomorrow, which are to a large extent regional in scope.

"These proposals suggest a modification of that local system," says Mathewson. "The introduction of regional thinking into the local governmental process in a firm and concrete manner."

He goes on to suggest direct election of the chairman of SEM-CGC and raises the possibility of a regional land tax to finance regional programs.

But Mathewson then flatly refuses what might appear to be a logical extension of his argument. "The drive toward regionalism is not a drive toward Metropolitan Government."

ON THE FACE of it, I'm not sure just why a super-government would be all bad for this region. It might save a lot of money eliminating duplicated programs, and it might even get some kind of orderly planning into government.

But Mathewson's probably right. Or at least politically correct.

For if he - or anyone else, for that matter - were to try to push a regional-type government, the screaming from all the guys in city and township halls from Detroit to Ann Arbor and Pontiac could be heard in Escanaba.

"They're taking local control away from local people," would be the cry.

Partly that would be horsefeathers, a disguised way of denying local politicians want to stay secure in their nice, comfortable local offices.

But partly that would be right. For it has long been an American assumption that local government ought to be as close as possible to the people. And things like city councils and township supervisors are a lot closer to the people than a regional executive council.

SO MATHEWSON properly backs away from the idea of a super-government. But he still insists on the need for new, regional kinds of local government units to deal with regional problems.

So where does he draw the line? Can he clearly distinguish between those functions which are most appropriately (and cheaply) handled by regional authorities and those which can best be handled by local cities and townships themselves?

It's awfully hard. For local government isn't the sort of thing you can jam into the kind of neat, logical box our civics teachers made so much of in high school.

But some examples come to mind:

1) No one wants a regional government to be giving Livonia's police department specific instructions on how to handle traffic jams on Five Mile Road. But a regional radio communications network linking all police departments in this area would eliminate the cost of each city having to maintain its own radio transmitter setup.

2) The Detroit Water Board distributes water to virtually the entire region, leaving up to local communities the details of distribution, tap-ins, billing, and so forth. This system seems to have worked fairly well.

3) Gov. Milliken has proposed a uniform state millage to support education. But it's also suggested that individual cities be free to pass special millages to pay for special programs in their own schools.

4) Mathewson raised the possibility of a regional land tax to pay for certain kinds of regional services, such as recreation and economic development. But it's common practice for individual cities to pay for sidewalks and street lighting on specific streets by a special assessment hitting

only those people who benefit directly.

THE POINT OF this shopping list is to suggest that it is possible on a case-by-case basis to identify where regional authority can be melded with local control.

It isn't easy to do this, particularly where individual local politicians see it in their interest to preserve their own area of authority from infringement.

But I suspect it's going to be increasingly important.

The regional nature of so many of our problems suggests that we'd better start thinking about just how our traditional system of local government can be modified to allow us to deal with these pressing problems and simultaneously maintain the close contact local government has with the people.

Livonia may be Livonia, and Plymouth may be Plymouth. But both are part of the entire metropolitan region.

Unless we who live in the suburbs learn to think regionally, we may not have any suburbs worth while living in.

DISSENT

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers Inc., but are presented in the belief that publication of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

By MRS. JOHN H. SCHMIDT
Plymouth

I read with interest the Feb. 1 article on movie ratings. One theatre manager says, concerning the G rated films, "Nobody comes. And nobody comes because there isn't family entertainment. Which came first the chicken or the egg?"

I have long felt that too many of the G rated films are so mediocre that they bore both youth and adult. With due respect to Walt Disney, whose cartoons continue to delight millions, the Walt Disney Studio Productions have been, for the most part, bland, stale and stereotyped. It's almost as if they are saying, "Well, it's time again to satisfy that small minority of G lovin' movie-goers - let's roll out another movie real quick."

Society in general is more sophisticated in their thinking, and it is an insult, especially to youth, to offer movies of such poor quality and slap a G rating on it. (That is not to say that movies' rated otherwise are any better!)

WITH ALL THEIR creative-ness, resources and technical know-how, why can't the movie industry turn out more high quality productions whose positive influence might stimulate minds, excite imaginations, nourish spirits, arouse genuine humor, and entertain all ages?

The potential for top-rated movies is boundless - think of the great wealth of books, history, science and human experience they can draw from! It's what they do with these resources that irritates me.

Comedies don't have to be inane to be amusing; love stories don't have to be explicit in sex to be genuine; science fiction doesn't have to be absurd to be fascinating; and the religious doesn't have to be saturated with sentimentality to be impressive.

All too rare are G rated movies as refreshing as "Endless Summer," as sensitive as "Run Wild, Run Free," or as mind opening as "2001: Space Odyssey."

Is it just assumed that the public is satisfied with the trivial and tasteless? We deserve better.

R.T. Thompson writes

Snowballs Can Be Dangerous

Just two weeks ago metropolitan and area newspapers published stories about a youngster who was killed when he ran into a car while trying to escape a motorist chasing him after a snowball had plopped into the side of his auto.

The boy was from Livonia and like all youngsters doing something they shouldn't, he darted away from this pursuer without looking in any direction. Others in the gang tossing snowballs did the same thing, taking off and vanishing as quickly as possible.

ONE WOULD HAVE thought this would be a lesson for youngsters and parents throughout the area. Parents to warn their boys and girls against throwing snowballs and the boys and girls to heed the dangers involved.

But latest information from the various communities, in what we prefer to term as Observerland, would tend to show that the lessons are going unheeded.

From drivers in the Livonia school system come reports of boys pelting pupils as they step into and out of the buses.

The drivers are complaining of boys of junior high age making things miserable for those in kindergarten and elementary grades when they throw snowballs and little action to stop them.

It's time for parents of the boys involved and those of the pupils on the buses to step in and

take every possible means of halting these pranks.

There was a time when snowballing was considered a prank but when it results in broken windows on buses, small children being pelted and drivers taunted when they attempt to protect their passengers - well, it ceases being a prank.

Most any resident of the suburbs, driving along the quiet streets in his or her neighborhood, is a target for a snowball.

IT MAY BE FUN for the youngsters but it definitely isn't for the drivers who are carefully moving along slippery streets and then suddenly a loud bang on the side of the car.

It is distracting and in the case of a nervous motorist may result in a sudden turn of the wheel and a possible accident.

That's why drivers slam on the brakes and start in the direction of the snowballers - they are mad and have a reason to be so. That's why the youth scatter and run in all directions - they know it's wrong and they want to get away from the spot as quickly as possible.

And in running they forget all about traffic cars and anything else.

It's time the message got home to parents and youngsters. There's a place for snowballing - in the backyard or a nearby field not at cars and buses.

LET'S GET ROLLING



Tim Richard writes

Are Suburbanites Getting A Tax Break?

It is the political season in suburbia, and one surefire way to get an audience, cheap, is to denounce the nefarious schemes of the Hon. Roman S. Gribbs, mayor of the City of Detroit.

The new mayor, it appears, has another one of those deficits that the big municipality seems perpetually heir to, and he proposes that the city income tax rate on Detroit residents be lifted from the current 2% to 2.5%, and on non-residents who work there from 0.5% to 1.25%, or half the resident rate.

So if you're a suburban politician, you knock Roman S. Gribbs and his desire to tax your constituents.

BUT LET US NOT knock him too hard, for one day those Detroiters may decide they're not getting what they deserve out of suburbanites who work there, and they may put on the muscle to extract more despite our indignant cries of "taxation without representation."

The truth of the matter is, suburbanites who work in Detroit are really getting away with something when they are asked to pay only half the tax rate that Detroiters pay.

Consider: The federal income tax is extracted from citizen and non-citizen alike. The immigrant who

hasn't received his papers, the foreign concert artist who tours the country for a few months, don't pay half the rate we pay. They pay the full rate. And they can't vote.

Consider the Michigan income tax. You pay it on all income earned in Michigan. It doesn't matter whether you're a resident and a voter the full time. You pay the full rate.

LET US CONSIDER the case of a friend who lives in Detroit and owns a thriving industrial

Sense And Nonsense

In Livonia recently they - well, just a handful of people - got into a squabble about books being used in a psychology class in high school.

One newspaper, referring to another books squabble, wrote about "Catcher in the Rye." That reporter, who apparently isn't well read, referred to it as "Catch Her in the Rye." (A Freudian slip, maybe?)

Another paper consistently reported that "Jordi" was about a retarded youngster. It isn't. It's about a schizophrenic, which is a mental illness, not retardation.

Only one newspaper handled the story in proper taste and with a correct handling of the facts, and you're reading it.

firm in Livonia. He pays property taxes to Livonia city and school district, where he doesn't live, at the full rate, not half-rate.

Or think of the college student attending school in Ann Arbor or East Lansing. A third of the student body in Ann Arbor is from outside the state, and a hefty portion of the East Lansing crowd is from outside, too.

They eat in a local restaurant, and they pay the full 4% sales tax. They buy a notebook and ballpoint in the local bookstore and get socked the full rate. They get a six-pack and pay the same beer tax the Michigan resident does. No half-rates for college students, the way suburbanites get in Detroit.

Consider tourism, now ranking right behind autos and farming as an industry in Michigan. The out-of-state tourist pays the full shot on the meals and groceries he buys here. He pays the same hotel-motel tax we do. He pays all the gasoline taxes to the state we do.

And he pays a higher price to use our state parks or to get a fishing or hunting license. He gets to pay the higher fee - a form of taxation - but he doesn't get any representation.

SO IF YOU GET nauseated of hearing a suburban politician

scream at Detroit's proposed income tax rate increase, ask him if he will also support a cut in the rate of federal taxes on aliens, a reduction in taxes on out-of-state college students, or a paring of the fees the non-resident tourist pays.

No doubt the politician will conjure up some weird reasoning for taxing those folks at equal or higher rates, but he will have an elaborate justification as to why commuting suburbanites shouldn't pay even half the Detroit income tax rate. Cheap politicians are like that.

Sense And Nonsense

We realize there has been a lot of snow during the past few days but one wonders why a car has been left in the ditch on Schoolcraft Road near the Compton Inn since last Friday.

Not only is the vehicle in the ditch but the front end is resting on a fire hydrant.

There is no dress so ridiculous, so tasteless, so expensive, that some woman won't buy it.

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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