

Decision on freeway ends years of controversy

Neil Goldschmidt did what no man has done before — he approved completion of Interstate-696. In one bold and laudable move, Goldschmidt imposed order on a freeway mired in 20 years of grief and uncertainty.

Unfortunately, Goldschmidt waited until Ronald Reagan was polishing his inaugural speech. Today, Goldschmidt is a private citizen, and the former U.S. transportation secretary's plan rests amid the clutter of papers prepared for the new administration.

The new team reportedly has been critical of federal highway projects. What that means for I-696 is anybody's guess. Proponents of the freeway, however, argue that Goldschmidt's decision will stand. Opponents, of course, disagree.

I-696 WILL COST some \$300 million by the time it is complete, sometime in 1989. The final price tag

will probably be much higher, but even at current projections the eight-mile leg will cost about \$37.5 million a mile.

Part of that big expense involves construction of several unique decks and overpasses, designed to lessen the impact of the freeway. Plans call for four grassy decks over the freeway. One would replace park land lost in Pleasant Ridge, and another would include a 150-unit senior citizen complex in Oak Park.

Plans also called for a multi-use parking deck near the Detroit Zoo to accommodate zoo visitors and persons using the SEMTA light rail station at Woodward Avenue.

"You will note," Goldschmidt said, "that the approved Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed I-696 . . . attempts to mitigate and minimize the environmental impacts of that facility upon adjacent communities."

WE AGREE that completion of I-696 will provide the missing link in the ring of freeways around Detroit. The freeway also will work well in conjunction with the light rail down Woodward.

We disagree with arguments that Goldschmidt's decision puts to rest 20 years of speculation as to when and if the freeway will be built.

Goldschmidt's announcement doesn't really resolve anything because the Reagan team has made it clear that it isn't in the mood for more concrete. Goldschmidt's recommendation could be overturned.

Assuming the Reagan people approve the freeway, there are other hurdles that must still be cleared. The freeway will rip through neighborhoods, deeply scarring some small, fine residential communities such as Lathrup Village, Huntington Woods and Pleasant Ridge.

The freeway will also disrupt the lives and lower the quality of life in the larger communities of

Southfield, Oak Park and Royal Oak. We have yet to see a community enhanced by the presence of a freeway.

But the few will suffer so that the many have a faster route to the eastern side of metropolitan Detroit.

SO, SINCE Goldschmidt has taken the issue out of limbo, we urge highway officials to get on with it. Build the thing. But all of us must work to see that the freeway's adverse impact is lessened as much as possible.

Follow Goldschmidt's recommendations. Zone property on either side to make practical use of the land. And make sure the freeway is tied into the light rail system, as promised.

With all that, the freeway still will be far from perfect. But at least the issue will be resolved and residents along its route can get on with their lives.

'Look what I cooked up for you!'



It's different when it happens to you

I'm not one much for blathering about personal matters.

Journalists, I believe, should make a strong habit of isolating their professional pursuits from their personal feelings.

But in this week's column I'm breaking that self-imposed rule.

Let me tell you why.

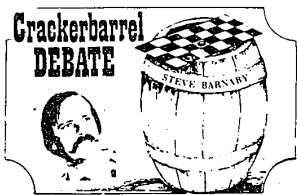
Last September, I found an envelope on my desk. Enclosed was a poem from Chuck Moran of Farmington. Last July Chuck lost his brother, David, who had been involved in an auto accident.

Chuck wanted to tell the world how he felt about his brother's death.

Last year at this time, I couldn't have really related to that situation very well. But on Jan. 28, 1980, that all changed. Brent Barnaby, my youngest brother, a member of the U.S. Coast Guard, died after his ship, the Blackthorne, was struck by an oil tanker in Tampa Bay, Fla.

Throughout my life I've seen a lot of persons die — friends, grandparents, professional colleagues. But brothers are something special. When they die, a part of you goes with them.

Next week, the Coast Guard will dedicate a memorial in Tampa Bay to those who died in the shipping accident.



So to all of those who lost brothers last year, Farmington's Chuck Moran's poem is dedicated.

My brother, to whom I love,
went to see the good Lord above,
And for this my heart is in pain
when will I see you again?

I feel a great emptiness inside my emotions
I try so hard to hide, but cannot do
but hurt me more.
Some day I'll see you on that sandy shore.
When will I see you again?

So, I must live with your memory
and a thousand unshed tears.

So a single day may seem as if a thousand years.

When will I see you again?

I will see you when I am an old man, old
before my time (your image I guess I pantomime)

For your death was not at all late
and closed to debate.

My death and thousands of tears
will come in years

That's when I'll see you again.

'Til then God only knows when I will see you again.

I'll do my best and comfort the rest to
remember you, as I hold so true.
For you are a part of me.

Today I feel so alone
and my heart filled with pain
until the day
I see you again.

Fascinating number: \$1 million

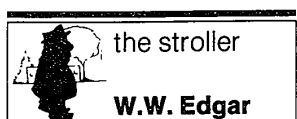
From the days of his childhood The Stroller always has been fascinated by numbers. As a youngster in the early grades, he was constantly delving into arithmetic — adding, subtracting and multiplying until he had his problems mastered.

But never have numbers fascinated him more than they do now when he reads the sports pages and finds himself gasping at the demands being made by athletes.

Whoever would have dreamed that a baseball player would value his services at \$1 million a year — especially a player who had the role of a designated hitter. This is the hitter who goes to the plate three or four times each game and does nothing else.

Try breaking that down and see how much he would be getting paid for each time he picked up a bat and strode to the plate. The figures become more fascinating when you figure that he managed to get a hit only about once in each three trips to the batter's box.

Try it and you'll find out how fascinating numbers can become.



YET STRANGE as it seems, the \$1-million-a-year demand is being made by Steve Kemp, Tiger left fielder, who is only a mediocre catcher of fly balls.

Then there is the case of Auriello Lopez, the pollied relief pitcher who is asking for a one-year contract calling for \$250,000. Fascinating. When you realize that he makes an average of 25 winning appearances a year he would collect \$10.00 for every game he won or saved.

Every time The Stroller reads of these demands, his thoughts go back to his younger days and the wages he received for working the long night shifts at such places like Bethlehem Steel.

When he had finished his apprenticeship with the Atlas Portland Cement Co. the going rate of pay was 22½ cents an hour. On the night shift, it was boosted to 25 cents. For a 13-hour night, he would draw \$3.25.

Later, as a full fledged machinist, he was proud to be given the top rate of 48 cents an hour at Bethlehem Steel. Just imagine how the young folks of today would holler and yelp at such wages.

AND THE STROLLER now is forced to smile when he recalls that he never took more than \$5 a week as spending money.

Of course he worked five nights each week and had only Saturday and Sunday nights to himself. Pennsylvania has blue laws that closed most business places on the Sabbath, so there was little chance to spend any money.

It is the memory of such things that makes The Stroller smile when he reads of such salary demands as \$1 million a year for playing baseball. They just rekindle his fascination for numbers.



Tim Richard

Charter unit, Ward earn our distrust

Honestly, my Jan. 12 column was written before Chairman George Ward made a fool of himself down at the Wayne County Charter Commission meeting.

The column was on the Open Meetings Act and how boards are unwise to listen to an attorney when they can read the act for themselves. I said:

"You must understand the nature of an attorney. An attorney is not God. An attorney is not an angel or a saint. An attorney is not even a dispassionate legal scholar."

"An attorney is a hired gun. An attorney tries to find a way to do what the board wants to do."

"Rarely do attorneys know much about the Open Meetings Act. Attorneys know contracts and bonds and liability because that's where the money is."

ALMOST AS I was writing, the Charter Commission was holding a two-hour closed session to interview candidates for executive director, its chief staff post. Tom Loneragan was covering it for us and reported:

"Charter Commission President George Ward, D-Detroit, said Thursday that none of the applicants . . . had requested that the group close its meeting."

"However, Ward, an attorney, said a discussion of the candidates' qualifications may be done in 'executive' session."

"During a break in the closed session, Ward admitted to reporters that the group had 'no copy of the Open Meetings Act' statute in front of us."

Ward was dead wrong. He was wrong in his recollection of the Open Meetings Act. He was wrong to lead the charter commission in such a closed session. He was wrong not to consult the act when challenged — and five commissioners did indeed challenge him by voting against closing the doors.

BUT YOU, as readers and voters, can make up your own minds. Don't consult an attorney. The Open Meetings Act is so plainly written that a person of average intelligence can understand it readily.

"Sec. 3. (1) All meetings of a public body shall be open to the public and shall be held in a place available to the general public. All persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting except as otherwise provided in this act."

"Sec. 8. A public body may meet in closed session only for the following purposes:

"(f) To review the specific contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office when the candidate requests that the application remain confidential. However, all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting pursuant to this act."

Those are the relevant portions of the law. What do you think?

WARD COMPOUNDED the error by leading two hours of closed-door discussion of the candidates after the interviews.

When the doors were finally opened, the commissioners conducted three ballots before eventually picking William H. O'Brien as executive director.

There was no public interviewing of the candidates. There was no public discussion of the candidates. The only thing done in public was voting.

Let us move on to another portion of the act which says:

"Sec. 12. (1) A public official who intentionally violates this act is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000."

If he does it a second time, the fine is up to \$2,000 or up to a year in prison.

I would suggest an even worse punishment for attorney Ward and the other 18 charter commissioners who voted to close the doors.

I suggest public distrust of them.