

We can survive Sunbelt onslaught, congressman says

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Faced with a federal administration oriented toward the Sunbelt, southeast Michigan can still survive and prosper if it plays its political cards right.

The key, said U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, is to "take the high road."

"Be positive. Let's not think of what we can take away from the Sunbelt."

The 2nd District congressman assessed the danger to Michigan and the Sunbelt as he spoke to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, whose 120-member local governments met Thursday as a general assembly in Southfield.

In his third term in Washington, Pursell has worked himself into a co-leadership position in the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition, a group whose analysis of President Reagan's budget proposals says the older northern industrial states will be hurt.

Regional planning — SEMCOG's chief reason for existence — would also suffer under Reagan's budget cuts.

Pursell, a rapid transit supporter, said he is resigned to the prospect that southeast Michigan's

plan for an underground light rail line would have to be scaled down to win federal funding. He insisted Gov. Milliken and regional leaders work out a new compromise, even if "we have to dump the subway."

BUT PURSELL told SEMCOG leaders there is hope if Sunbelt political leaders on Capitol Hill and at home play their cards right. His advice:

- Continue to make the Sunbelt congressional coalition more bipartisan. "The northeast coalition started as a very liberal organization. . . It's now emerging as a bipartisan group. But if we take a divisive position, it will be counter-productive. We (northeast) have 213 members, but we are losing 20 congressmen in 1982."

- Be better organized. He cited a floor battle in 1980 in which the outnumbered Snowbelt beat the Sunbelt by 40 votes on a defense money bill simply by getting all its votes on the floor.

- Pick its targets carefully. "We're not going to reopen Kincheloe Air Force Base (in the upper peninsula). But we can study the defense budget and go after contracts for auto glass, carpeting and chemicals. . . The toughest battle in appropriations — the federal budget of \$660 billion is being cut \$45 billion — is to take the remaining balance and bring

some back in transportation, housing and student aid."

- Do "rational, long-range regional planning. Where is the plan for rebuilding Detroit? Most congressmen don't know what it is. Most taxpayers don't know what it is. I don't know it. I'm not sure you know it."

He asked: "Why isn't Wayne State University participating in rebuilding the city of Detroit?"

- Sell southeast Michigan's advantages: an adequate water supply compared to shortages in the Sunbelt, the St. Lawrence Seaway, good highways, "hopefully" balanced transportation, research centers, a good labor market, tourism, changing seasons, and a moderate climate which has historically been associated with high productivity.

SEMCOG has begun participation in a Greater Detroit/Southeast Michigan Economic Action Council, SEMCOG Chairman Robert L. Bovitz reported.

It has joined the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, state Office of Economic Expansion and Detroit Edison Co.



'Take the high road. Be positive. Let's not think of what we can take away from the Sunbelt.'

— Rep. Carl Pursell

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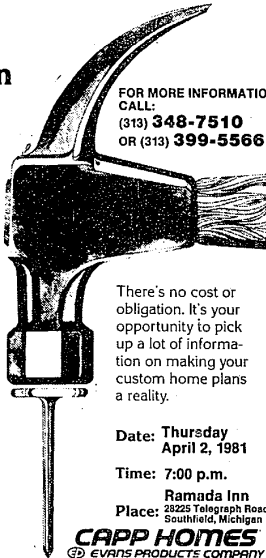
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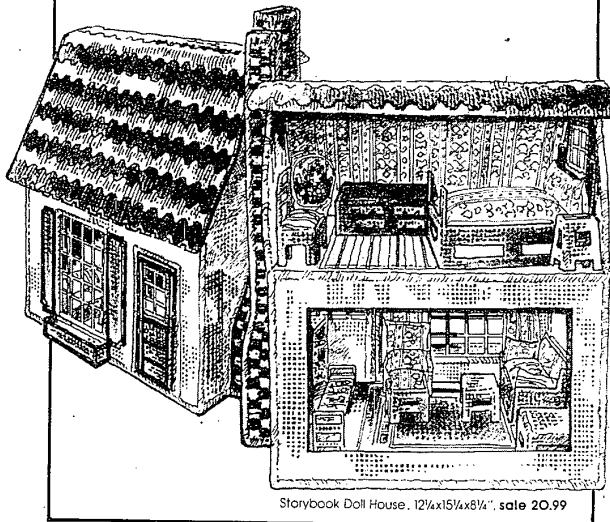
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