

OBSERVATION POINT



Is Census Report Kept Confidential?

By Philip H. Power

So the U.S. government now knows how many people use my kitchen. It also knows if the computer can read my handwriting, which is doubtful, my monthly rent, my name and my birthday.

Thank heavens I didn't get the long form that the census people send to some in this area. I understand it took hours to figure how to fill it out.

Like most folks, I had mixed feelings about the census. It's very useful and necessary, of course, and there is a law that says you have to fill it out. But somehow I kept feeling that just how many people use my kitchen

or what my rent might be is my own business.

Particularly when I have to fill out my name and address on the form. You know darn well that all that information, which I consider mostly my business alone, is going to be stored, with my name on some computer in Washington, D.C.

That bothered me.

IT REMINDED me of a note that came through the mail recently from 19th District Congressman Jack McDonald.

He pointed out that the government has been selling mailing lists out of its data banks. The

Post Office, for example, sells lists to firms which then sell or rent them to commercial and non-profit organizations.

Much of the "junk mail" which clogs our mail boxes was sent and addressed by these means.

The Federal Aviation Administration sells its computer lists of licensed pilots to aviation magazines. The Internal Revenue Service sells a list of 140,000 licensed gun dealers and collectors, which seems in itself to violate the purposes of the firearms control legislation which Congress passed a couple of years ago.

The government evidently gets quite a lot of money from selling

such lists, and it claims that the Freedom of Information Act requires it to do so.

BUT CONGRESSMAN McDonald doesn't agree, and neither do I.

He points out that "when a citizen has to provide information to the government, he should not, as a result, subject himself to harassment and solicitations by private concerns using this government-collected data."

He's introduced a bill to prohibit the government from furnishing mailing lists and other lists of names and addresses to businesses and the public for any purpose.

It's a sensible bill, and it deserves support.

I hope it will prevent misuse of the census information the government has been collecting.

We all get more than enough junk mail now, and I'd rather not be added to yet more lists as a result of the government's sale of census data.



Dennis L. Pajot writes

Did Schoolcraft College Board Err In Decision?

The Schoolcraft Community College Board of Trustees should have accepted the student senate president as an official advisor at the board table.

The four trustees who defeated the proposal, opposing three who favored it, showed self-defeating narrow-mindedness, rather than constructive interest in the welfare of the college community.

The lone argument used against the proposal that rings anything like "public interest" reasoning was that of: "it'll set a dangerous precedent. We'll be forced to accept other special interest group advisors if we accept this one."

WHAT'S WRONG with that?

Is it better to listen to the multi-voiced opinions of several who compose a special interest,

voices which might or might not reflect authority to represent a consensus?

Would a policy-making board poll the several workers of a large corporation to learn the official position of that corporation, taking a chance that opinions gained would be those the corporation could or would support?

Likewise, seating of the student-elected president of the student senate would provide an opportunity to bypass impromptu student remarks during board meetings.

Concensus opinion could be asked of the senate president, or he could be asked to gain an official concensus opinion for future reference.

As it is now, the student senate is heard by the board only as its president or any of its various members are recognized by the

chair from the audience, giving the board no discretion for selection of commentators or right to expect any to carry out a board request.

If the board wants to exclude other "special interests" representatives, it can. If it wants to accept any and all, it can do that too. It hires consultants. It listens to citizens, businessmen, etc.

Why shouldn't it be able to tap citizen-elected homeowner's presidents and chamber of commerce leaders as "advisory board members," for instance.

In all cases, the board would retain the prerogative of requiring that matters brought to its attention by such "advisors" must first go through established channels for possible prior resolution in order to be considered.

Seems like the board could only gain.

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 EDWARD BENDA Farmington

The Observer printed an article recently announcing a \$3500 tax base study including some interesting comments by Farmington Township Trustee Earl Oppertbauer.

Mr. O. indicated that many township residents would be surprised to know that the single family home provides the poorest tax base and that apartments, etc., are a necessary key to a well planned community.

After only living in the township several years, nothing surprises me but what might surprise Mr. O. is that his very logical statement might be true elsewhere but in Farmington Township I believe the actual facts are in opposition to his statement.

For example, the Independence Greens Apartment Complex (the residence of Mr. Hall, the township supervisor) sits on 159 acres and has 1970 assessed valuation (50% of market) at \$5,138,000. If only 300 homes were built and valued each at \$50,000 market (not at all unlike Independence Commons) this property (land and homes) would have an assessed valuation of approximately 7.5 million dollars - considerably above what we are realizing now from the apartments and I don't believe this home density is unrealistic.

It is also interesting to recognize that The Observer article on assessments in December of 1969, mentioned that the State uses as a rule of thumb that approximately 40% of the apartments monthly rental income should go towards the tax payments.

*Based on the information I can read on the Independence Greens apartment signs - 942 rentals leasing and starting at \$140/month (I'm sure these are minimums) it would appear that instead of 40% the township will only realize 10-15% in 1970 (based on \$50/1000 assessed) or some \$155,000 low. I'm sure the township and school district could use the money.

It is also interesting to note that this complex went from an assessed valuation of \$1 million in 1969 to over \$5 million in 1970 (or a 25% increase) with a very large increase in available housing through an extensive building program. My own assessment went up 22% and all I did was cut the grass and shovel snow.

I would also like to predict

Reader Disagrees With Tax Study

the outcome of the planning study - "We will need an extensive apartment and townhouse building program" and if I'm not too bold, located in the 12 Mile-Drake area.

The large amount of land held in this area by developers is presently being assessed far below market. I say if the developers wish to run the township let them try.

Recently in an Observer article, Mr. Osgood, as spokesman for his home owners group, indicated that new subdivisions are assessed initially at far below market. My experience - checking the Independence Commons subdivision and others verifies his observation.

I'm sure this furnishes some additional advantage to the salesman in selling the remaining new homes and once all lots and homes are sold the developers have done their "thing" and the citizen is on his own.

Mr. Osgood indicated his intention to protest to the State

because his assessment was apparently equal to market value.

I maintain that until all properties are correct at market value the real estate sample which is used to determine the equalization factor which then affects all property on the tax roll might further increase your real assessment used for actual tax determination. The citizen has until May 4 of this year to register his protest with a State Tax Commission provided he has appeared before the so-called Review Board.

I have registered my complaint and I intend to point out the inconsistency in assessment practices that exists in the township.

It's only through a sufficient citizens movement will we be able to correct these problems. My basic position is to eliminate the property value as a base for taxes because of the obvious problems to the retired and other fixed incomes and to the special interests assessment situation we are faced with in our township.

R.T. Thompson writes

Open Board Meetings

For a long time, way too long for those in the news media, there have been complaints from many of the communities covered by the Observer Newspapers that school boards have not opened meetings to the public.

In many instances, the trustees have closed doors to all and then continued with their regular business, announcing decisions after adjournment but never allowing the news reporters or the public to listen to the comments of the various members.

In many instances, complaints about this sort of treatment have resulted in a tighter policy instead of more of an open door type.

WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED this closed door to the press at more than one meeting in various areas of Observerland, and we never accepted it without a bit of an argument with the top officials.

It has always been our feeling that all meetings of boards, school, township, city commis-

sion or city council, should be wide open to the press and the public - unless there is a matter of a personnel problem to discuss.

Now it appears the State Board of Education is planning to explore ways in which the local boards can be encouraged to keep meetings open to the public.

State Board Member Marilyn Jean Kelly, of Detroit, has proposed that her board sit down with officials of the Michigan Association of School Boards as the first step in discussing the situation.

AS WE ALL KNOW, most school districts are facing acute financial problems now which will probably get greater in the next year or so.

With or without the advice of the State Board of Education, it's high time for all local boards to throw open the doors and welcome the public - after all, members are voted in by the electorate and that same group can decide the future of the board and the school district.

Tim Richard writes

Home Rule For Oakland?

Usually when one writes about county government, it's to condemn or sneer at its archaic structure and the avarice of the courthouse gang.

In all truth, however, there are a few good things going on, both in Wayne and Oakland counties.

In Oakland, they are going to have a day-long conference on home rule on April 16. Co-sponsors are the County Board of Commissioners, Oakland University, Metropolitan Fund and other such thinkers on the problems of living together.

At this point, it's difficult to say what conclusions or plans this conference will hatch. The list of

speakers is impressive, and we will be watching this meeting of minds very carefully.

IN WAYNE COUNTY, there has been some disappointment that the county commissioners didn't put another home rule proposal on the ballot for the August primaries. A board majority some months ago indicated it would revive the home rule issue.

But the board seems to have had its reasons. In our 1968 editorial endorsing home rule for Wayne County, we pointed out that the County Home Rule Act (No. 293 of 1966) had a lot of unnecessary restrictions on the ability of a charter commission to

write a truly flexible county charter that could meet local needs.

Well, it seems the commissioners' reorganization committee has written some amendments it would like to see attached to that home rule law.

ONE WOULD give a charter commission the option of proposing either an appointive county manager or elected county executive.

Under the present law, only an elected county executive could be proposed. The amendment Wayne County is asking will allow counties to hire professional managers, outside of partisan politics, in the same way some of our better-run cities have.

The Legislature should pass such an amendment. Counties ought to be free to have professional management if they want it.

A PAIR OF interesting amendments is aimed at purifying the atmosphere in which a county charter commission would operate.

First, public officials would be prohibited from running for the county charter commission; this means the voters will have a better chance to elect fair-minded, objective persons to write their charter - not someone with an axe to grind and a job to protect.

Second, members of the charter commission would be unable to run for another elective office while serving on the charter commission. This would prevent a budding politician from using the charter commission as a stepping-stone to higher office - at least until the charter is written.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

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The Lionia Observer • The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer • The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer • The Southfield Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.

271 S. Main Street, P.O. Box 200, Plymouth, Mich. 48170

Serving the communities of:
Lionia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington,
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village