

OBSERVATION POINT

Time For State To Finance Schools

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

There is so much blather about taxes, assessments, preserving the tax base, "reforming" taxes, cutting taxes for this group, raising 'em for that group, etc., etc., ad nauseum... that it was a treat to read a little economic sense on the subject.

The sense came from Robert Merriam, chairman of an advisory commission on inter-governmental relations, when he spoke recently to the National League of Cities conference.

Merriam doesn't like the property tax, which is hardly news. What is news is that he has some reasoned thoughts on where we ought to move.

AS SCHOOLS become more dependent on the property tax, he said, "it is becoming increasingly evident that the local property tax is incapable of supporting both schools and local governments," which few will disagree with.

He proposes that the state take over much of the financ-

ing of schools. In recent years, the State of Michigan has picked up between 40 and 60 per cent of the tab; lately, it has dropped off to the 40 per cent mark.

A pet idea of many congressmen, including some from this area, is that the federal government should share its revenue with the state-local units because the "feds" have the best revenue-raiser of all in the graduated income tax.

If revenue-sharing comes to pass, then the states should use that opportunity to get the schools out of the property tax-collecting business.

ON THE OTHER hand, Merriam says, the property tax makes more sense when used to finance municipal government, because many municipal services—fire protection, zoning, building inspection, paving—benefit property.

I don't know that I share his enthusiasm for the property

tax in any form. Yet if there is to be a property tax, it seems better to let municipalities use it than the schools.

But there is another important consideration—especially for Observerland suburbs—in reducing local government's reliance on the property tax. Says Merriam:

"The one-acre suburban lot can be denounced as an example of snob zoning, but it is more often justified as an act of local financial prudence—the only sure way of holding down school costs and local property tax rates."

"Fiscal logic calls for building up the local tax base by zoning great stretches of land for commercial and/or industrial purposes," he said, "and many local units hope to snare a giant shopping center or industrial park to help out with taxes."

HE WAS TALKING about what I've called "cash register government"—the tendency for local public officials to make decisions with first consideration given to the tax base and no consideration to the needs of people or to a balanced offering of housing.

Cut the school property tax—which takes up anywhere from half to 70 per cent of the total property tax bills—says Merriam, adding:

"Confronted with the fact that homes of modest value could pay their own way once relieved of the school financing burden, it would become more difficult for suburban officials to justify exclusionary zoning or efforts to attract big property taxpayers."

And that, I might add, would mean government for the people, not for the cash register.



Dennis L. Pajot writes

Need For Change

Southfield District Judge James Clarkson is pleading for no more than moral justice when he says:

"There's got to be a differentiation between guilty prisoners and those awaiting examination..." He stated this after vowing to be liberal when placing bonds on suspects brought before his court after a 17-year-old youth who couldn't make bond was beaten while in jail.

As it turned out, the four later accused of beating the youth were also simply awaiting trial, but the point remains the same.

William Bannon, warden of the Detroit House of Correction, has been making the same point in his attempt to ward off use of DeHoCo as a pending jail for Wayne County courts. He cites a state law which so far has required that accused

prisoners not be mingled with convicted prisoners there.

Putting persons not even yet proven guilty into the same environs smacks as a refutation of the American principle of "innocent until proven guilty." Rather, it typifies the type of "justice" we are supposedly combating in our cold war struggles.

Perhaps most of us in the affluent suburbs are able to apply that other great American phenomenon—money—and keep our fresh air surroundings while building a defense around an expensive attorney's bag of tricks. Perhaps we needn't worry about the poor, the unformed, the ghetto students of the street. Perhaps.

THEN, AGAIN, maybe we are worried about muggings at our shopping centers, drugs in our schools, safety at downtown sports stadiums, security of our home and office possessions and prices at our stores that are upped to compensate for shoplifting.

If so, we are also protecting our self interests by doing anything in our power to reduce incidence of crime. Among other things, a sound teaching of respect for law and the system to the wayward can go a long way towards this goal.

Respect will not be gained if the innocent are subjected to beatings, rapes, expert instructions in higher criminal techniques and other indignities while simply awaiting proper trial.

To avoid restrictions on our judges' prerogatives and to further the cause of law and order, if you will, we need to invest more in facilities for holding prisoners.

Tim Richard writes

18-Year-Old Vote Brings Problems

The headlines all said that Michigan faces legal confusion because of the U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the 18-year-old vote for federal elections but knocking it down for state and local elections.

That's good. If it takes a crisis to make our state do something about the legal problems of the people under 21, then let the crisis come. It's about time we tackled the mess.

City clerks are worried about how they're going to separate an election when most of the voters can vote on everything but the rest can vote only for president and Congress.

They're wondering, too, whether the 18-20 age group can run for offices, circulate petitions, sign petitions, and serve as challengers at voting places.

They're wondering, if they accept the "junior" registration of the 18-20 group, whether they'll have to make that group re-register as "seniors" when they hit 21.

And so on in the political sphere.

BUT THERE IS another sphere to the problem of the under-21 age group. Unfortunately, it's getting little attention from the instant commen-

tators, the courts and from State Rep. Jackie Vaughn III (D-Detroit), who has set himself up as the champion of young persons' rights.

It is the sphere of economic and other legal rights for the young people—a sphere that recognizes not just 18 and 21 as the ages of majority but a whole host of ages.

At 18 you may be old enough to vote for president, but you can't buy a car or real estate. At 18 you may vote for U.S. senator, but you can't buy a glass of beer.

At 18 you get to vote for U.S. representative, but you can't be licensed to practice many trades.

You have the great right to stand trial for crimes as an adult when you're 17, and a probate judge can even waive jurisdiction over 16-year-olds and send them into the criminal courts.

You have problems getting married, problems getting serious medical help if your parent doesn't want to sign a paper, problems willing your corpse to science.

THERE IS A danger in doing a piecemeal job of revising the rights and duties of those under 21. The danger is partly to be seen in the "crisis" that Michi-

gan election laws are in. Business law is also being amended piecemeal.

England did it the right way. That country lowered the age of majority on everything to 18 with a single act of Parliament.

Fortunately, Michigan is taking a constructive step in this field. A few months ago, Gov.

Milliken appointed a Special Commission on the Age of Majority which is due to report early in 1971. The commission realizes, quite wisely, that both (a) rights and (b) responsibilities are at stake. It also realizes there is more to life than politics.

We eagerly await that commission's recommendation.

New Program Draws Praise

By LORAIN McCLUSH

The vocational education schools that Oakland County voters approved some three years ago are about to materialize for teens who live in the southeastern part of the county. The center for Southfield and Lathrup students is located in Royal Oak and will be opened in September.

Area teens, who are now sophomore and juniors, will be introduced to what the center has to offer in January. Meanwhile all of us can rejoice for this major breakthrough in public education.

Southfield and Lathrup precincts voted overwhelmingly for this millage in 1967, so they have to be made aware of the benefits this will bring the future employe, as well as the employer and community as a whole: bona fide apprentice training in a choice of 26 skills to be completed in a co-op situation for a two year period while the student receives high school credits.

An adjunct to this is that the teachers employed will not be required to have a BS degree, but will be hired on their personal working background in the field they will teach.

HIRING TEACHERS who have the working experience to equate the educational time necessary for a teacher's certificate in vocational fields is not new. But the technical schools with skilled teachers in Michigan are few and far between and stand as lonely and sad examples that have had to cover fantastically large areas.

Now, the Oakland County's vocational program will bring about the first large-scale hiring of this kind of teacher

southern Michigan has ever known. The very practicality of it has to be a boon for everyone.

I can't help but remember an editor who took a rather morbid pride in stating that he could tell in a one day period if a just - out - of - college reporter had studied under a "newspaperman" or "just a teacher."

More pathetic are the stories commercial artists tell about the student who has won a blue ribbon for cubism and is genuinely ignorant of the fact that this will not get him a job in a commercial studio.

When I related my personal experiences with this kind of thing to Keith Isaacson, Southfield's vocational education coordinator, he commented, "It would be nice to find a carpenter with a BS degree, but people with BS degrees are just not likely to be able to teach a kid how to put a roof on a building while its snowing."

The Royal Oak Center is located at 14 Mile and Coolidge. Driving by it one can't help but be awed that that structure times four, one in each corner of the county, is made possible with one-half of a mill.

Senator Tells Of What's Ahead

By CARL PURSELL
State Senator-Elect

With the implementation of the state constitution of 1963, state government has undergone several reforms that have been primarily administrative. Some of these reforms have reflected greater efficiency and better delivery of service. For the most part however, state government has been quite distant from local needs and individual problems.

The 1970's will see a greater demand for a more responsive state government simply because local government has limited capabilities both financial and provincial. I would hope that state government could develop an appropriate liaison with local government and together through their combined resources solve the difficult problems that confront our state.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT HAS a closeness with the people that state government does not have. It is in a position to respond quickly. With its limitations, it has an asset the state does not have.

Therefore, if the state government can provide its financial capabilities and have local and county government match it with its assets, possibly through a single vehicle, in our urban areas maybe we can strike the right cord to develop a rapid transit system, resolve our pollution problems, improve our attack on crime and in general, bring all levels of government together in a single force.

In most cases today, government at the different levels operate in a vacuum from each other, going their own merry way spending and duplicating services or ignoring needed services altogether.

It would be my hope that the coming years will bring about a high level of leadership that will set aside provincial attitudes, and will challenge both the public and private sector to develop an instrument that will meet the needs of the urban area in the future years.

I believe that so-called instrument is relatively unknown today. I suspect it will be a vehicle that will utilize the assets of each governmental level and effectively use the talents of the private sector to manage it.

It will conserve our present taxing powers. It will be able to tap "the expert" when needed and it will be a responsive force that will anticipate problems before they engulf us.

You say, I must be kidding. Lets get together in 1990 and reflect on the results.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher
The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer • The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer • The Southfield News & 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:
Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms,
Village of Beverly Hills