

## OBSERVATION POINT

## Nixon's State Of The Union: A Suburban View

By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

The proposals made in President Nixon's "state of the union" address last Friday are enormously important to every suburban community in this country. At their heart is a revolutionary idea that would return true power and adequate financing to local government.

The president wants a revenue sharing program, in which money previously doled out by federal agencies for specific programs would be turned over to state and local governments without strings attached. His argument is that such a system would reduce bureaucratic red tape and waste, improve efficiency, and direct money where real needs exist on the local level rather than to some vague project which has caught the eye of some pencil pusher in Washington.

At the core of this program is the goal of reversing the trend which has progressively centralized power and tax revenue in Washington for the past 40 years.

The people who have been holding demonstrations, shouting "Power to the people," better move over. President Nixon could turn out to be the biggest revolutionary of them all.

OBVIOUSLY, the president has recognized that most folks-suburban white collar or urban black-are plenty sore at a government that promises what it can't deliver, wastes more than it spends effectively, and is more responsive to bureaucratic delay than to the real needs of the people.

The taxpayers may not know about all the theories of public administration, but they sure know they're paying too high a tax bill for a government which can't clean up the streets, stop crime, clean up the air and water, provide decent transportation or educate children.

Having some direct experience with the federal bureaucracy, I can only agree with the president's idea that turning over the control of money to local government represents our best hope of having a government system that really does what it's supposed to.

ONE PROBLEM, however, with the idea is that it is still not clear just how the money will be allocated.

The president has proposed \$16 billion for the whole thing. If you spread this out on a per capita basis, Michigan's share would be around \$68 million. If all the money were distributed

to local governments on the same per capita basis, the share of the communities served by this newspaper would be around \$35 million. Southfield, for example, would get around \$6.3 million.

That's a mammoth sum, as anybody in local government in this area will tell you.

But even assuming the president gets the entire \$16 billion (a dubious assumption, at best) will Michigan decide to distribute the money on a per capita basis? How much will the state take and how much will go directly to the local governments? Will the suburbs get some kind of a fair shake, especially in view of the claims that will be advanced by the City of Detroit for its poor citizens and deteriorating services?

There is no present answer to these questions, although presumably such decisions would be made by the State Legislature.

My own guess is that the state will take quite a slice, and that core cities will get a disproportionate share. The suburbs will be comparatively well off, and it will be hard for suburban legislators to argue that a per capita formula is best.

It may be that the amount of money Nixon is talking about isn't as large as it seems if the shared revenue is really diverted from the existing hog-podge of aid to cities.

In either event, revenue-sharing will be welcome by many city officials around here. At a recent Michigan Municipal League regional meeting, the loudest complaints our newsmen heard were the sheer complexity, the paperwork and the long processing delays of the Washington bureaucracy.

BUT THE suburbs will get SOME money if revenue sharing becomes a reality.

The real question is what will the suburbs do with it? And that depends on the skill and effectiveness of people in suburban local government.

One thing that has happened as governmental power and tax money became centralized in Washington is that skilled and able people interested in government gravitated toward the federal government.

Most people in local government in the suburbs are there on a part time basis, serving the public because they feel a responsibility to do so. By and large, they are able people, sincerely motivated to try to do a good job.

They are not experts in government administration. Fortunately, they don't claim to be.

But figuring out how best to spend another \$1 million or so is no easy job.

One cynic I talked to over the weekend said he thinks the local politicians will steal it all.

I can't agree. People like Southfield's Pete Cristiano, Farmington's John Dinan, Westland's Mayor Gene McKinney and Livonia's Mayor

Ed McNamara are men of great skill, energy, and dedication to public service.

They'll need help if they're going to use the revenue sharing money they might get wisely.

But that's the challenge of local government. It has never been nor will ever be better than the quality of people willing to participate in it.

That's why the revenue sharing program is so exciting. It just might give us better government -- where it counts.

Tim Richard writes

## SEMTA Gets A Boss With Answers

One of the most relieved and relaxed men in this entire world metropolis this week is Bill Ostenson, a lawyer by training who lives in Southfield and has had a lot of responsibility for a man of 31 years.

Ostenson has been executive secretary of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority, and his big job last Friday was to set up a press conference for the announcement that SEMTA had hired a general manager.

"This is nice. I've been looking forward to this day. This is phase two," he said.

PHASE TWO means that SEMTA is starting to become an operating authority, not just a study-er and planner. Ostenson himself had been chief hired man at SEMTA but had never been called -- or wanted to be -- "general manager." That title, he always declared, should belong to the man who

would actually run a public transportation system.

The man who will be general manager is Thomas H. Lipscomb, 57, a retired Army major general who in the past two years has been head man for a port authority and rapid transit system in the Philadelphia area.

Explained Ostenson: "It's a bi-state authority. They run a couple of toll bridges, a port, and the transit system. The transit line is fully automated. It runs across a bridge from downtown Philadelphia to the suburbs in New Jersey; there's a track on either side of the bridge."

OSTENSON came here four years ago with a background in public administration and went to work for Metropolitan Fund. MF is a non-profit research outfit which has been battling 1,000 in getting things going -- the Transportation and Land Use Study, New Detroit, the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments, SEMTA.

ENOUGH TO MAKE  
A CITY DROOL...

Ostenson was put to work drafting the state legislation that created SEMTA, and the bill got through. He became SEMTA's executive secretary when the agency was created a bit more than three years ago.

There was a lot of ground work to be done: Planning grants from the federal government, money from the state, an inventory of bus systems in the central three counties of the region, a plan to consolidate them, engineering plans for rapid transit lines, a demonstration grant for busses in an economic opportunity job program that brought inner city workers to the suburbs of Macomb County and Southfield.

ALL THE WHILE, SEMTA has never had a source of income of its own. It has, however, made a believer out of Gov. William Milliken to the point where Milliken put money in last year's budget for

transit and is considering giving SEMTA its own tax source.

One report is that Milliken will recommend a half-cent increase in the gasoline tax for transportation. "To the best of our knowledge, no decision has been made. If one has been made, we're getting conned," says Ostenson, who doesn't get conned easily.

But he's glad that Milliken does intend to come up with some source of revenue for the transit authority.

What of Bill Ostenson's personal future?

"I've been like a two-mile runner. I've paced myself to collapse about this point, and I'm about ready to collapse," he says. He'll stick around to break in Tom Lipscomb, "but I'm not committed indefinitely."

If Bill Ostenson sticks around southeast Michigan, the region will be the richer for it. If not, he won't have any trouble getting a good job anywhere.

Bob McClellan writes

## Teens On Jury Might Surprise

Recently William M. Kunstler, chief defense attorney in the Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, asked a U.S. District Court judge in Detroit to seat 18-year-olds on the jury so the defendants in his latest case can be tried by their peers.

Kunstler is defending White Panther leader Lawrence R. (Pun) Plamondon, John W. (Jack) Forrest and John A. Sinclair on conspiracy charges in connection with the 1968 bombing of a Central Intelligence Agency office in Ann Arbor.

The defendants are in their 20s and Kunstler thinks they'll get a better shake if some kids are on the jury. Kunstler also hopes to use Allen Ginsberg, beat generation poet, and Julian Bond, Georgia legislator, as expert witnesses on youth in the trial, obviously to improve the chances of getting his clients off the hook.

I admire Kunstler's zealous approach to his work, but I challenge the wisdom of his tactic. Frankly, I think he's all wet.

IF HE WERE able to stack his jury with 18-year-

olds, they might give him the shock of his life.

The young people in this country are simply not the radicals, the revolutionaries, the iconoclasts that many adults seem to believe.

They are, it is true, more candid, more free in their sex habits, more impatient with obvious wrongs in our society, but they have no desire to rip the nation apart in their efforts to effect long overdue change. But they do insist upon change, and chances are they'll get it.

So if Kunstler thinks the young people in this country will be more sympathetic with accused anarchists, he's barking up the wrong tree.

Fact is today's kids tend to

be moderate with just a tinge of conservatism in their bones. So, in this respect, they're really not much different than their parents.

And I'm not making these observations through the smoke swirls of a marijuana cigarette. I'm basing my statements on the result of a Louis Harris and Associates survey, commissioned by Life Magazine, on interviews with a national cross section of 26 million American boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 21.

Life concludes this about the Harris poll of the kids: "Change, yes--upheaval, no."

THIS brings me to Kunstler's choice of Ginsberg and

Bond as his expert witnesses on youth. He could have done much better by picking such people as Bill Cosby, Neil Armstrong and John Wayne. Or Robert F. Kennedy if he were still alive.

Why? Because these four men, in the Harris poll, were most admired by the kids. And, significantly, the least admired were Fidel Castro, Eldridge Cleaver, George Wallace and the late Ho Chi Minh.

These nonheroes, you'll notice, are extremists of right or left.

Many of the nation's parents may be uptight because of their kids' preoccupation with drugs and sex.

Relax, Mom and Dad.

A majority of the kids questioned by the Harris people said they were opposed to legalizing pot. And 96 per cent of the kids declared a man should be faithful to his wife, and 97 per cent of them asserted a wife should be true to her husband.

Not even the John Birch Society could get much more conservative than that.

## Editorial &amp; Opinion

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