



By Phil H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Environment Issue Reaches Grass Roots

Back in the old days, it was said that come spring a young man's fancy turns to love. That may still be true, but this spring an increasing number of people are thinking about the environment, too.

Earth Week is being celebrated all across the country, this week, with a series of locally-oriented efforts designed to do something about the quality of our world.

A lot of activity is taking place here in the suburbs. Some examples:

- Schoolcraft College is putting on a week-long program of talks ranging from population growth to pesticides. They're open to the public, and a call to the college will get you the details.

- National Can Co. has opened a metal can recycling station at its plant at 13000 Levan Road in Livonia. Although the Livonia Environmental Action Committee is putting on a special drive this week, the public is welcome to bring in clean cans, open at both ends, with the paper off, from Monday through Thursday in the future.

- Glass bottle recycling programs are springing up all over, with a special program going on at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Township.

- Ninth graders in Plymouth have set up a can collection station across from the downtown post office during this week.

- High school and grade school programs on the environment are taking place in numbers too big to mention.

FROM ALL THIS activity, it's perfectly clear that concern with the environment is a genuine issue and not a fad.

Michael McCloskey, executive director of the Sierra Club, notes that "we've reached a higher level of consciousness. The staging of events is passing from the scene."

I think he's right. Last year's Earth Day celebration, although encouraging, had a little of a circus about it. You couldn't be sure that after all the big show, they would fold the tents and steal out of town, never to be seen again.

A glance of the list of what's going on this week here in the suburbs suggests that the key thing about the environmental quality movement is

that it is becoming (pardon the expression) a grass roots one.

Local people -- not big names or fancy figures -- but just folks are getting involved. The kids are participating through the schools, and even the business community -- long the pet evil of the anti-pollution people -- is waking up.

TWO YEARS AGO, just after the New Year ushered in the decade of the '70s, I wrote that I felt that the environmen-

tal issue would be the key one during the coming 10 years.

I've written many prophecies which turned out to be wrong, but I think I may be right on this one.

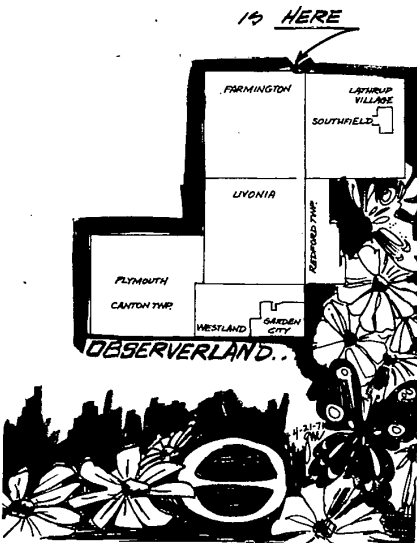
After all, the environment issue is a natural for us in the suburbs. We moved here to get a little open space, to see the trees and feel the land. And when they are destroyed, we all can note the change and gain a real sense of how much we have lost.

Perhaps the best indication of how deeply the issue has sunk in took place last Friday. The people building the new expressway along Schoolcraft Road were burning trees that had been cut down to make the right of way.

Our phones were jammed all day with angry people, calling to protest the burning.

That's public concern, and it proves that the conservation movement has come a long way.

CONSTERNATION ABOUT CONSERVATION



R.T. Thompson writes

3 Boards Need PR Lessons

With financial woes coming from all directions and with the need for a proper image in the eyes of, to say the least, skeptical public, it would appear that school and college boards would do everything possible to create better public relations.

However, from recent incidents in Plymouth, Livonia and at Schoolcraft College, it would appear that is farthest from the minds of the boards involved.

Schoolcraft College, currently involved in a court suit over reapportionment, is the most flagrant violator... due largely to a recent action in which the board of trustees named Chairman Mrs. Jane Moehle, of Plymouth, as the sole spokesman in any matters regarding the legal litigation.

The Schoolcraft board has been charged more than once with ducking into an executive session, better known as a secret meeting, to keep information from leaking out to the news media.

True enough there are matters, such as personnel problems, that should be handled behind closed doors. But this board goes into executive sessions for many items that should become available to the public, especially the voters in the college district who are paying the bills.

There isn't any question in the minds of those close to the community college situation but that Schoolcraft College will have to undergo a reapportionment in order to follow the one man-one vote policy ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court as long as a year ago in a decision handed down in a Missouri case.

Neither should there be any question that voters in the district should be made aware of developments as quickly as they happen.

SUCH ISN'T the case. Just a week ago, the trustees met on the evening before the suit was to go before the court to decide on a course of action.

Queried about the meeting, Mrs. Moehle told reporters it would be an executive (secret, closed door) session. So no reporters turned out.

Then with the knowledge that none was on hand, the

board went into a public meeting with no one attending. An important resolution was passed, determining the steps the board's legal counsel would take the next day.

The resolution wasn't made available to the news media until after the hearing, even though it was the basis of the board's case.

Schoolcraft's board didn't chalk up any brownie points in this instance, as in similar instances during the past 11 years. It appears as if the college is maturing but the board isn't.

THEN THERE IS the incident in Plymouth where the school board publicly announced a meeting for a Monday night and then scheduled it for a Saturday morning at 8 a.m. without notifying the news media.

It's a small matter, but symbolic.

Sure, enough, the board fulfilled its legal requirements by placing a notice of the Saturday meeting on the entrance to the administration building.

But all that was needed was for someone to pick up a phone and make a few calls. So another meeting was held publicly in complete secrecy.

The Livonia school board appears to be defeating its own purposes by holding open study sessions on its acute, financial problems.

It does little good to have 300 people in the audience and then have the board discuss matters that appear on an agenda and on memos only in the hands of the trustees.

Such was the case at the recent meeting in Bentley High School where the board was discussing items 16 and 17 and such and none in the audience had the slightest idea of what was happening.

The matter was corrected by handing out the same materials to the audience but not in time to forestall numerous complaints.

The public is entitled to know and it is the responsibility of the boards to make sure they do... not to keep it in the dark. After all it is the public that goes to the polls to decide such things as money, board members and the like.

It's time these boards matured and learned the facts.

Judge Turns Legislator

From a constitutional point of view, Wayne Circuit Judge Roland Olzak did the right thing in deciding that Schoolcraft College board seats should be reapportioned on a "one-man, one-vote" basis.

But we have serious reservations about the second half of his announced decision--the part in which he has agreed to issue a writ of mandamus against the college board ordering it to draw up a new apportionment plan for his approval.

What he has done is to put his court, along with the college board, in the position of writing legislation. We think he is overstepping his bounds.

Drawing up apportionment plans is the business of the Michigan Legislature, not a court or a college board.

IT'S CLEAR that the present apportionment plan under state law--which allows one board seat per school district, regardless of size--is unconstitutional. The state law is defective.

But this doesn't mean that the court should step in and approve a new set of boundaries. Such a step would be all right if the Legislature had failed to draw up a new law,

but there is no indication the Legislature is shirking its responsibility.

Quite the contrary: State Rep. Marvin Stempien of Livonia has drawn up a bill that would allow community college trustees to be elected from single member districts of equal population.

Moreover, Stempien's bill would give the power to draw up the districts to the County Apportionment Commission, composed of three county officers and two political party chairmen. That's the same group that draws up districts for the County Board of Commissioners, and in Wayne County the Apportionment Commission has done a pretty good job.

What Judge Olzak is doing is allowing the present Schoolcraft trustees--people who may have an ax to grind--to reapportion themselves. If they should decide to do some gerrymandering, he might be unable to recognize it.

The State Board of Education is considering another feasible alternative--requiring at-large elections. The Dept. of Education has drafted such a bill, and the state board has indicated it will choose be-

tween that draft and the Stempien bill.

WE'D RATHER see the Legislature be given the year of 1971 to listen to the state board's recommendation, mull it over and then pass a suitable bill.

It would mean that we wouldn't get reapportionment until 1972 instead of the Sept. 13 date indicated in Judge Olzak's courtroom last week.

But a nine-month delay wouldn't be that harmful. After all, no one is arguing that Schoolcraft students from Clariceville and Northville are getting better educations than Livonians because the two small districts have proportionately greater representation on the board.

Maybe it's too late, but we hope Judge Olzak will reconsider. He could help the Schoolcraft district more by simply ordering reapportionment for the June 1972 election instead of rushing into a Sept. 13 election with a plan written by the college board itself. There's no need for judicial rush, and much to be gained by an orderly legislative procedure.

-Observer Newspapers

Tim Richard writes

Taxes To Help Environment

During Earth Week, the young folks and the young at heart are paying a lot of attention to banning throwaway bottles, recycling, re-using meal cans, cleaning up the Rouge River. For this they deserve praise and applause, and we herewith extend it to them.

But it will take more than a cleanup job to save the Earth

from being exhausted and overcrowded by man, the most destructive animal ever created or evolved.

It's going to take some radical changes in our social policies, and last week I nominated the tax laws as an instrument for discouraging over-breeding and over-consumption of petroleum. Let's continue the list.

AS DEVELOPERS build more subdivisions, they use a hop-skip-jump method, and they buy up good farmland to build houses on. That means more people and less cropland to feed them. We've got to quit that sometime.

In order to save cropland to feed us, an environmentalist would advocate a punitive capital gains tax on the sale of farmland for development. This would take the gain out of exploiting our natural resources.

ELECTRIC POWER is a major culprit. Conventional power plants eat up huge amounts of unreplaceable fossil fuels and belch smoke into the air. Nuclear power plants eat up our shoreline and discharge warm, deoxygenated water into the lakes.

A decade ago, American industry used 24,810 kilowatt hours of electricity per worker

per year; today it uses 37,912 kwh--about 50 per cent more.

Typically, big users get "bulk" rates, but a pro-environmentalist policy would reverse this. We'd charge a higher rate (or a graduated tax) as electric consumption went up.

WESTLAND'S Mayor Gene McKinney recently proposed a new set of water rates designed to raise more revenue. One method is to raise the price, but McKinney also wants to do away with discounts to big water users.

I don't know whether McKinney was thinking primarily of revenue, of helping the little guy or of the environment, but his proposed water rates do have their environmental implications -- good ones.

We're using water at incredible rates, especially in industry. Maybe we'd all be a little more cautious in our water consumption with a set of rates that better reflect the strain we're putting on our environment.

The problems are massive. The lobbies for the mining, oil, electric, real estate and auto industries are formidable. But we've got only one Earth.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Phil 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.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms,
Village of Beverly Hills