

He's what's on



JERRY ZOLINSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Everywhere you look: Highland employee Sheldon Klein gets a good, up-close look at President Bill Clinton during the president's televised town hall meeting Wednesday. Klein was just a few miles up the road from the president, whose appearance was broadcast live from a Southfield television station.

Town hall

Clinton, metro area make a bit of history

Marlene Davis admitted to being a little star-struck. The Southfield schools superintendent has met plenty of VIPs, but this was the president of the United States. "I hope I get to shake his hand," Davis said, preparing for her Wednesday visit with Bill Clinton. "I know he's the type of person who likes to go through crowds, so maybe there's a chance." Davis was a member of the hand-picked audience of 60 inside the Southfield studios of WXYZ-TV for Clinton's televised town talk Wednesday night. Security was tight for the

president's first visit outside Washington, D.C. It was billed as a direct tete-a-tete with the American public. Clinton staffers kept the media at bay. Station personnel, meanwhile, kept audience members under wraps until after the broadcast. Davis never got to ask her question — about how the president would improve public education. Outside, about a hundred members of St. John Apostolic Armenian Church and other Armenian churches staged what they called a "peaceful protest" at the corner of 10 Mile and Northwestern Highway, urging

the president not to forget Armenia. "We'd like President Clinton to help lift the blockade of energy to Armenia. It's a very desperate situation there," said a church spokeswoman who declined to give her name. What kind of ratings Clinton pulled won't likely be known until today, but interest appeared higher in some areas than others. At the Leather Bottle Inn, near the Farmington Hills/Livonia city limits, a half-dozen or so bar patrons found more interesting topics of conversation. "Maybe everyone's waiting for

the Gloved One," joked Penny Parker of Livonia. Michael Jackson's meeting with Oprah Winfrey was on next. If the president wanted some instant insight into his metro area surroundings, there were plenty of signs near the broadcast site — a placard-carrying woman was pillorying Michigan Gov. John Engler, while a nearby fast-food chain's sign invited the president in for a hamburger — but the most succinct was carried by a man along Southfield Road, north of the station. It read, simply: Will Work for Food.

County seeks SEMCOG votes

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Baker vs. Carr

For years the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments avoided the issue — "one person, one vote." It was just a planning agency; it didn't have governmental powers, everyone said. But on its 25th anniversary, SEMCOG finds the federal government has thrust governmental powers on it — allocating transportation funds. Recently the old system of "one government, one vote" — with a few extra votes for Detroit and the counties — was challenged in a SEMCOG meeting. "By any rational criteria, Oakland County is underrepresented," said John Grubba, the new deputy county executive representing L. Brooks Patterson on the SEMCOG executive committee. "When SEMCOG was exclusively a planning agency, the problem of votes was less than now, when it's a (money) dispensing agency. The federal government seems bent on giving governmental powers that previously were exercised by state and local government."

SEMCOG was formed in 1968, just four years after the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the Tennessee case of Baker vs. Carr. That ruling said all legislative bodies must be apportioned on the basis of equal-population districts. Very quickly, the courts ruled Michigan's Senate apportionment unconstitutional. Ditto for all county boards. And ditto for Schoolcraft College's system, where each school district was entitled to only one trustee. SEMCOG was organized as a regional planning agency required under a 1960s highway act. But now, under last year's Intermodal Surface Transportation Act (called ISTEA), Mack said, "SEMCOG has moved closer to governmental decision-making responsibility. This has motivated some members, particularly the city of Detroit, to question relative voting strength on SEMCOG's executive committee and General Assembly." Mack said the issue was raised in committee last May but shoved temporarily into the background "so that it would not become an election issue."

The numbers

Milton Mack, the Wayne County probate judge who chairs SEMCOG's bylaws committee, provided the numbers that made Oakland County and Detroit sit up and take notice. He said SEMCOG has operated with a "loosely proportional" voting system — for example, Oakland with a population of 1.1 million gets four votes; Detroit three. Dividing population by the number of SEMCOG executive committee votes, Mack showed bigger units are being shorted: Livingston County — 28,911 persons per executive committee vote; Monroe County — 33,400 persons per vote; St. Clair County — 36,402 per vote; Washtenaw County — 70,734 per vote; Macomb County — 119,567 per vote; Suburban Wayne County — 135,464 per vote; Oakland County — 180,599 per vote; City of Detroit — 342,658. Detroit members agreed with Grubba.

The question of giving SEMCOG governmental powers both created some executive committee members, such as Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills. "Whatever happened to home rule government?" he asked. Two-tiered plan? Mack, a former suburban Wayne County commissioner, said staff is studying a two-tiered voting plan used in Phoenix and Denver. Under it: All voting would be conducted under the existing system. A second system of voting in proportion to population would be used either on certain issues, such as road money, or whenever a governmental unit demanded it. "Denver has had it since 1965, but no one has ever called for a second-tier vote," Mack said. He gave SEMCOG members background on a dozen other regional organizations around the country.

Clean air plan

Without debate, SEMCOG's executive committee approved its long-discussed plan, required under the federal Clean Air Act, to reduce air emissions 15 percent by 1996.

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