

So many calls for action, so few common crusades

By DOUG FUNK

President Bill Clinton has called for a national consensus on his economic recovery proposals. "This economic plan cannot please everyone," he said. "The test of our program cannot simply be — what's in it for me? The question must be — what's in it for us?"

But has our society become so divided that consensus isn't possible? Does the mere fact that advocacy groups have arisen on behalf of senior citizens, children, urban interests, welfare rights, women's issues and minorities, among others, mean that a national focus is unattainable? It's possible to come together, apparently, but it takes a special set of circumstances to make it happen.

Something like a crisis, said Jacqueline Scherer, a sociology professor at Oakland University in Rochester. And she believes we're there now.

"What good does it do senior citizens to protect their interests if there's so much decline there's no money for Social Security?" Scherer projected.

"Students graduating today have very little chance of getting as good a job as their parents. Middle class income, real income with allowance for inflation, has declined since '74."

THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN Us vs. Them

Causes unite us

Donald F. Fracassi, has served as mayor of Southfield for more than two decades. "Proper leadership can make the country come together like during Desert Storm," he said. "Americans have come together when they wanted to succeed like (putting a) man on the moon.

"In national furts like earthquakes in California, and the Carolinas when a hurricane hit, people did without to send money, clothes, food. That was across lines.

"I find for the most part, people are self-centered and selfish to a degree and care only about the world they're in," Fracassi said. "However, I still believe that across the line young people, old people, the middle class, the wealthy will come together... if they have a reason."

And Clinton blew it in Fracassi's eyes when the president first

said families with income in excess of \$200,000 would take a big economic hit, then changed his mind to \$100,000.

Too many special interests?

Trustworthiness is the key, concurred Sylvia A. Kozoroky-Wiacek, director of the senior resources department in Westland and a former Wayne-Westland School Board member.

"I believe with all of my heart, that if you're honest, up-front and believe in what you're doing, it will work," she said. "You've got to have facts and figures to show it."

"You can't get off the track," Kozoroky-Wiacek said. "Before you make a commitment, you have to study it and know what you're saying."

"We have too many special interest groups," she said. "You'll never hit 100 percent consensus. I think you do well to hit 50 percent and above."

"I think people are jumping to conclusions and making rash judgments before it happens," she said of Clinton's plan. "I believe we have to start somewhere. A percentage you're not going to please no matter what."

Betsy Weihl, chairwoman of the Michigan Coalition for Children and Families, a volunteer advocacy group, doesn't think the rules of the game will ever change.



"You're never not going to have competition for resources. Choices mean competition," she said. "It's going to take a lot of understanding of each other's agendas, guts by policymakers to make hard choices, and a lot of willingness by citizens, grassroots folks, to come into the arena and tell policymakers what they want them to do," Weihl said.

The Rev. Chuck Sonquist, pastor of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Livonia, says he was brought up by his parents to make a difference.

Divisive individualism

"Selfishness is a general disease that affects all of us," he said. "A unique kind of thing our country has not shared by any other culture, I know, is individualism."

"I had a professor in the seminary from Germany and he would

say in his own unique way, 'The trouble with you Americans is you're always looking for either/or. In Europe, we're looking for both ends.'"

We can come together, Sonquist said, "only at times where we see the threat is sufficient."

And that time is now, he said. "We're finally getting the scales off our eyes. The precipitous rise of indebtedness eventually will kill us. The other area is the health care thing."

Sonquist sees the biggest clash today between the economic haves and have-nots regardless of age. Fracassi finds that senior citizens are especially vocal in their concerns.

Scherer perceives a different agenda between people receiving economic benefits and children's needs. Weihl sees the struggle in social services as between treat-

ment vs. prevention. "We have to find a way for the underclass and the privileged class to hear each other," Sonquist said. "If they don't hear each other, they can't form consensus."

"We need leadership because there's so many voices clamoring to be heard," Scherer said. "Part of the reason we're so fractious is there's a general distrust of government, all institutions, big business, partly because we know more about them."

"And issues have become so complex it's possible for anyone to argue any five sides of an issue," she said.

But that's the American way, said William Maccauley, chairman of the political science department at Oakland University. "If consensus is unanimity, it's never going to happen," he said.

'Government by the people' is subject to interpretation

By CASEY HANS

STAFF WRITER

Local experts believe President Bill Clinton's hands-on approach and his new economic plan will impact government — in ways both good and bad.

Karl Gregory, Oakland University professor of economics and management, said Clinton's approach has revitalized the public as the new president goes on the road to sell the American people on his economic plan.

"Clinton... is going directly to the people," he said. "And he's not going just anywhere — he's going to the trouble spots."

Clinton's plan calls for increased social programs, budget cuts and new taxes on income and energy to decrease a burgeoning federal deficit. But Clinton said he must also go back on campaign promises calling for a middle class tax cut.

Oakland County economist Patrick Anderson, senior policy analyst for the Macchine Center, is worried that Clinton's about-face on these campaign promises will lead to a distrust of government and less involvement.

"What he has done in the first 60 days is do more to damage the trust in government than I've seen since Richard Nixon," Anderson said. "It has the affect of tarnishing government at all levels."

Term limits

Gregory said public involvement will be necessary in Michigan because term limitation for elected officials was approved last November. Paid staffers will hold much more

THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN The role of government

power as a constantly new crop of elected officials rely more and more on them.

An involved public will keep the pressure on, he added.

Farmington Hills city councilman and Democratic activist Aldo Vagnozzi believes Clinton's style "is making a difference," especially at the state and federal levels. Locally, Vagnozzi has recommended that his own city council use a call-in "public comment" segment during cablecast city council meetings to encourage involvement.

"You're going to see more and more reduction by public officials with the increased constituent involvement," he added. "And that's good."

Getting involved can mean everything from writing to legislators to attending meetings and voting.

John Farabaugh of Canton Township is one of those who has gotten involved. Farabaugh said he "voted for the first time in a very long time" in November and is hopeful about a future under Clinton's leadership. "Since the race started, I felt it was really time to get involved," Farabaugh said. "It's about time something is done. Our country is in bad shape."

Vagnozzi stressed he doesn't see Clinton's plan as a "return to the '70s" and big social spending. "The money isn't

there and he has to apply some of it to reducing the debt," he said.

Blueprint for expansion?

Keith Edwards, state chairman of the Michigan Libertarian Party, which espouses less government, disagrees.

"This seems to be a blueprint for expansion of government and power," he said, adding that some of Clinton's philosophies allow government to "snoop into small businesses" and "virtually stick a gun in their ribs" by adding taxes and restrictions.

Gregory said that although such conservative philosophy has become popular, he doesn't buy it.

"There's a new conventional wisdom that the government that governs least governs best," he said. "But government can't just sit on the sidelines. It has to make sure there's an even playing field internationally."

He believes the government should take a leading role in health care, the welfare system, international relations, taxing and infrastructure. "We've had over a decade of not recognizing what the challenges are... and sweeping them under the rug," he added.

People, cities related

Pat Sharp of the Livonia League of Women Voters said the league supports many of Clinton's proposals including access to health care, equitable taxation and preserving the environment. She sees local government improving with Clinton's ideas. "As people are better off, so will the city be," she added.

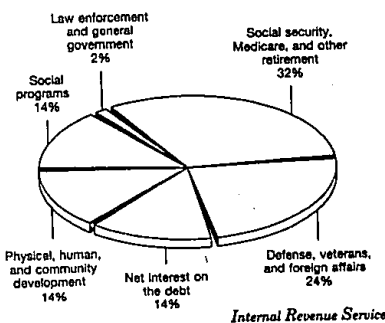
Mike Claus, former President of the AFSCME local which represents workers in Garden City, said it's too early to analyze the impact of the president's plan in his city. "He hasn't been in there long enough for any of his policies to come into effect," he said. "Only time will tell."

In Plymouth, Mayor Robert Jones said the city has given federal representatives a wish list of projects which include: repaving Plymouth Road, funding for a new library and help with the city's downtown revitalization effort.

Federal funding for any of these would have a positive impact on the city and its operation, he said, although little detail is known about Clinton's plan and thus, little is known about the actual impact on local cities.

"If I could tell you that, I could walk on water," he added.

U.S. government expenditures



WHAT WARMING TREND?

50% off all sale coats at Neiman Marcus. Three days only. Starting today.

The groundhog had it right. You're due for more chilly weather before this season is through. So come to Neiman Marcus and save on an impressive selection of coats and outerwear assembled from NIM stores across the country. Save 50%* on coats and outerwear for women. But hurry, because it may seem like winter lasts forever in Michigan, but this sale ends Wednesday.

*Off original prices. Interim markdowns may have been taken. Selected merchandise only. All fur labeled to show country of origin. Prior season's merchandise may be included.

Neiman Marcus
How to look™

The Somerset Collection 2705 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy 313-643-3300