

# Observer Newspapers

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## From the Publisher's Desk

### OBSERVATION POINT

**By Philip H. Power**

"LET'S GET THE POST Office out of politics!" has been one of the reformer's standard cries for years. At last, it looks like someone is actually doing something about it, and a pretty unexpected person at that.

Last week, Larry O'Brien, backdoor political artist for former President Kennedy and more recently Postmaster General for President Johnson, proposed that the entire U.S. postal system be taken out from under the burden of political patronage. O'Brien wants to put the Post Office under an independent, non-profit corporation, somewhat like the successful Tennessee Valley Authority, which would run the system in an independent business-like way. Diagnosing the Post Office's present deficit (which will result in yet another postage rate increase this year) as caused in part by an excess of political interference, O'Brien wants to make the entire setup independent of the politicians. At which, I can only say "amen."

As Administrative Assistant for a U.S. Congressman for two years, I was directly involved in the workings of the political patronage system in the Post Office. I didn't like it. The Congressman didn't like it. Most of the postal appointees we talked to didn't like it.

The system worked roughly like this:

Given the fact that there was a Democratic Administration in Washington, the local Congressman had the informal authority to make certain postal appointments, virtually on his own say so.

Rural mail carriers were appointed by the Post Office Department, assuming they met various qualifications and passed certain proficiency exams, on the direct recommendation of the local Congressman. Postmaster appointments, which require the consent of the Senate, were traditionally made along lines of the Congressman's recommendation, assuming that the senior Senator was a Democrat.

Republican Congressmen didn't get much voice in postal appointments. Just as Democratic Congressmen didn't during the Eisenhower Republican Administration.

Such a system, friends and neighbors, is called political patronage.

Some Congressmen that I saw in Washington, many would make their postal appointments entirely on their own. Since postal appointees, once selected, are protected by Civil Service regulations, such Congressmen could build up a fantastically potent political organization over the years, just from grateful political appointees.

In Michigan, at least in the Congressional districts with which I was familiar, the system worked a little bit differently.

Generally, the Congressman would be informed by the Post Office Department that a postmaster or rural carrier vacancy existed. He then would pass this information along to the (Democratic) County Committee responsible for the county in which the vacancy existed. Notices of the vacancy were also posted in post offices and passed on by word of mouth.

The County Committee would then interview prospective applicants and make a recommendation to the Congressman. Almost always, this recommendation was accepted and passed on to the proper authorities in Washington.

As I understand it, during the interview with the County Committee, it was assumed that the prospective appointee would be a member of the (Democratic) Party. Equally, it was assumed that he (or, more likely his wife) would want to make a contribution to the Party's coffers, should he get the appointment.

As I mentioned, no one liked this system.

The Post Office officials didn't like it, because they always had to contend with the Party officials in trying to run their operations efficiently. The Party officials didn't like it, because the political appointees (or their wives) never seemed to contribute enough to the Party.

Neither the Congressman nor myself liked it, because going through the long process of setting up the political and personal favors that always seemed to come up when postal appointments were being considered was a terrible waste of time. Besides, it had the curious smell of impropriety.

In fact, my Congressman went so far as to have drafted a bill putting all postal appointments under non-political civil service procedures.

Now, by all this I don't want to be accused of saying things I don't mean. I do not imply that the U.S. Post Office is ridden by politics. Incompetence and bribery, rather, I imply that the existing patronage procedures cannot help but raise suspicions.

Nor do I mean to say that only Democrats participate in this system. The patronage system has been going a long time, and both Republicans and Democrats have been gleefully exploring its advantages (and disadvantages) for many years.

Nor do I mean to suggest that there was any impropriety whatsoever in the selection of postal officials in this area. I have no direct knowledge of their appointment, outside of my high regard for former Congressman Weston Vivian and Billie Farnum and Congressman William Ford.

Nor do I infer that postal officials are incompetent, political hacks. On the contrary, in my dealings with postal officials in this area, I have found them without exception to be able, efficient and dedicated civil servants.

Nor do I make any direct accusations that bribes are in fact taken by various County Committees during interviews for postal appointments. I have never participated in such interviews, and most of what I know comes from post office appointees themselves.

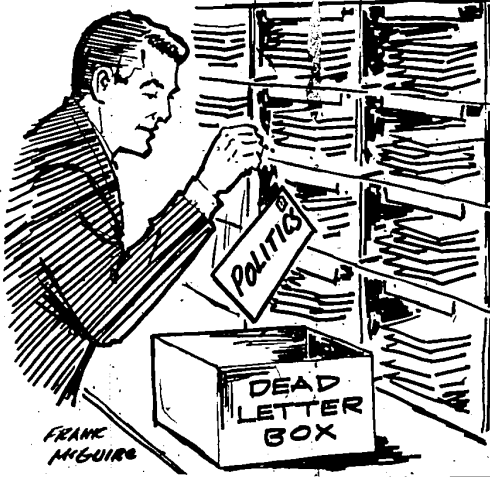
What I DO mean to say, quite bluntly, is that the existence of an overall political patronage system in our Post Office Department cannot help but make people suspicious.

Suspicious of what? Suspicious that political affiliations and contributions may play a more important role in the selection of postmasters and rural carriers than their human ability and businesslike efficiency.

Our postal officials are too loyal and efficient to allow themselves to come under public suspicion, just because the political patronage system is still entwined around part of the U.S. Post Office.

Larry O'Brien is absolutely right. Let's get politics out of the Post Office.

If that happened, we might even go a few years without another postage rate increase.



## Letters To Editor:

### The Other Side of Vietnam

**Editor:**

After reading letters in the Observer about the war in Vietnam, it seems to me that a recapitulation of the course of events in that troubled country might clarify the situation a little. This is something that almost anyone might do, for the records are available and can be found without too much effort.

When the Japanese withdrew from Vietnam in 1945, most of the country was in control of the Vietminh, a nationalist coalition of several parties, and they organized an independent government and issued a Declaration of Independence. In 1946, however, the French came back in force with the intention of resuming their former control and the war for independence began. In 1949 the French set up a puppet government in Saigon and in 1950 made a treaty with it granting Vietnam freedom within the French Union but with the French retaining substantial control. This was quite unacceptable to a majority of the Vietnamese people, a majority reported by President Eisenhower to be in the neighborhood of eighty per cent. So the war went on.

Normally Americans might be expected to back a former colony against a colonial empire, but our government had been suspicious of the independence movement in Vietnam from the start because of its leader, Ho Chi Minh, was reported to be a communist, so it took us into the war on the French side and eventually spent some three billion dollars in their support. In spite of this help, the French were decisively defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and were "forced" to grant Vietnam complete independence.

With the departure of the French, the puppet government might have been expected to collapse, but many westernized Vietnamese, some of whom had fought on the French side in the war for independence (analogous to the Tories in our war for independence) wanted to make it the government of a new state separated from the rest of Vietnam. The French was really a secessionist movement with some interesting similarities to the one in our country a century ago, but in this case the government in Washington decided to support it although it had so little popular support that it could not possibly succeed without foreign help.

This meant civil war but an armistice was arranged and a conference at Geneva all parties agreed to have free elections in 1956 to decide the question of unification and drew a military line of demarcation between the contending forces with the

express warning that the line was not to be considered a political boundary. Our government agreed to these decisions and also issued a unilateral statement promising to "refrain from the threat or use of force to disturb them," and to "seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations."

These are the only commitments we have made to the Vietnamese people. It was largely our failure to fulfill these commitments that brought on the civil war and we got into the war and to prevent their fulfillment. If this war in Vietnam is against communism, we are giving aid and comfort to the enemy, for right now we are fighting democracy and giving convincing demonstration of our lack of faith in democracy.

**Hallen M. Hall**  
Farmington

**Ticket Unnecessary.**

Open letter to Municipal Court of Westland:

Enclosed is payment for Summons #22929.

This is a poor way to convince me of the need for police funds and police officers for the City of Westland. The above summons was for parking "left wheel to curb" in front of my home. It has been the policy of people living in the Conquistador Subdivision to park in front of their homes in which ever direction they were headed for the past nine years.

It seems to me, in view of the precedent of not having ticketed cars in the past for this violation, that the issuing officer could have done one of two things: he could have walked up to my house and said "Sir, is that your car in front?"

"I would you please turn it around and park it the right way and continue to park it the right way in the future." It would not have taken any longer to do this than it did to write the ticket; or he could have issued a "Warning Ticket" and then if the practice continued, issue tickets.

The fact that you wanted to "crack down" on parking violations could also have been made known through the local newspapers. I hope this letter will convince someone in our city to "make haste slowly."

**Robert B. McDonald**  
Westland

**No Communication**

**Editor:**

At the Westland City Council Meeting, April 3, a statement was made by Councilman McMillan concerning the Water Department budget. Mr. McMillan appeared to have been concerned about the expenditures of the Water Department, and the board of his constituents asked what a certain employee did in the D.P.S. he would be unable to give a specific answer as to the duties of this employee.

It is my understanding that the D.P.S. and the Water Department have been working without a Job Classification

## OBSERVING the Scene . . .

By MYRA CHANDLER

"All aboard for the moon!"

"The president will be greeting a delegation this afternoon from Mars."

"Take a pill for dinner tonight dear, I'm in a hurry—we have some good steak ones on the shelf."

All of these comments are reasonable and within reach of the present generation.

And yet—tax-weary parents across the land are beginning to realize our school systems are still attached to the Spring plow.

Not one kid in 100 has sown a seed, plucked a vine, or fed a pig—but school is still dismissed at the old concept of time for Spring plowing and starts again after Fall harvesting.

What a waste, not only of money, but of thought processes.

In Livonia it is necessary to build 100 classrooms a year to keep up with population growth. When water lines are extended into Plymouth Township and Farmington Township, added classrooms will be needed for these communities. This is at a cost of millions of dollars a year. Livonia's projected budget has doubled and exceeds 24 million. Farmington has a school they cannot open in the Fall because they cannot afford it.

By using the school building the whole year 'round, at least 25 per cent more students could be educated in the same buildings.

By law, students must go to school 180 days. A school calendar could be divided into four quarters of 60-day sessions. Three sessions with their busy little minds churning and one session for vacation.

Academically this could prove to be a decided advantage, particularly in the summer.

Psychologists have urged teachers and professors to use the out-of-doors for teaching. They see a definite relaxing atmosphere conducive to learning in the background that nature provides. The Biology, Art, Music, English, History students would be able to have classes outdoors with the grass as their chair and their lap as a desk. Remember, it was the psychologists' idea, not the economists'. All of the suburban schools have courtyards, large areas of ground, surrounding the schools ideal for classrooms.

To get around the obvious problem of families vacationing together, students would be placed in school in alphabetical arrangement. Thus, all the Browns could take a winter vacation skiing in Northern Michigan this year instead of taking their usual July freezing vacation. And all the Smiths could go to Florida.

In addition to less buildings, school districts would buy less typewriters, shop and home economic equipment and in the case of using outdoor classrooms there would be less general wear and tear on the school.

Another advantage would be the spreading of the talent and energy of young people into our commercial market throughout the year. Merchants in Livonia and Farmington employ young people in the summer in banks, in restaurants and in stores. But there are more students than jobs. This way 25 per cent would be looking for a vacation job while 75 per cent were in school.

Let us not overlook our long-suffering teachers. They would certainly benefit. No more house painters and store clerks for summer substance. Year 'round school would automatically give teachers a 20 per cent increase in pay.

We might have a little trouble with Dad and, true, the coach might swallow his whistle when he discovered his star half-back was on Fall vacation and was going out for Spring basketball—this problem would take a little working over.

Parks and Recreation programs are big in our suburban area and they presently use school buses, playgrounds. They would have to develop a year-round program using City parks instead.

There are, certainly a few bugs to the plan BUT if the end result means kids are educated with less pressure; financial gains are made by better utilization of schools; and we have healthier, happier kids as a result of more productivity, we as parents, we as taxpayers, we as schoolers in the Spring Plow and modernize!

## What's for Supper Tonight, Or Aren't We Having Any?

You go to a very lengthy meeting And after a while you find that the seating On which you have been sitting is much harder Than at home where there is beer in the larder.

But the important thing is that they spend much of their time talking about taxes. And now if nobody wants to pay them, many projects will be cut with sharp axes.

This proves to be extremely disturbing Because it is nice to have streets and curbing

And to have good schools and good teachers

Plus plenty of room on gymnasium bleachers.

So you wonder why someone doesn't mention Vietnam — Or is it because no one really gives a damn? Instead of dropping bombs on the Viet.

Cong and Hanou.

Maybe we could drop some parks and schools on Venno, Merriman, Schoolcraft, Grand River, Middlebelt.

Some place like that which everybody felt Would help improve the human race.

Let's bow our heads and ask God's grace.

—BILL GAIL

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## Letters to the Editor:

**Why City Money?**

**Editor:**

I'd like to know how the Livonia City Council can justify spending \$225 a month to rent the WFS building for a Senior Citizen "drop-in" center.

"Looking Around Livonia" column written by Palabra Ultimo stated "If the City Council is legally able to spend City money this way it will be approved." Legal or not, don't the citizens have any say in this?

Why don't the senior citizens scurry around themselves and arrange accommodations for their meetings?

In my mother and father's area (they are senior citizens) the parish priest offered the church hall, free of charge, to the old folks and also the use of the school bus when not in use for their intended purposes.

All they pay for is the gas for the bus and provide a driver. They charge dues to defray the cost of coffee, etc., and generally charge a very small fee for the parking which pays for the gas and any other incidents which are bound to come up.

I'm sure other churches in this area could be approached in this manner and come up with some solution for everyone. Perhaps a church in different sections of the City could be used each month to make it more convenient for the older people of that area to get to the meeting.

Each age group has problems unique unto itself but spending City funds for one particular group's entertainment is not right.

**Mrs. H.B. Livonia**

In answer to your question in the P.S. part of your letter the answer is Myra Chandler.

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