

OPINION

**The Gazette**

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GAZETTE EDITORIALS

Seniority rules snarl police work

WHOEVER WINS the Cedar Rapids safety commissioner race had better keep right on running. He must plunge into the union-contract thicket and help hack away at seniority-rule obstructions — overtime clauses that, almost incredibly, allowed a couple of specially trained homicide detectives to decline participation in the investigation of the convenience store slaying early Sept. 8.

As safety commissioner candidate J.D. Smith pointed out in The Gazette's Sept. 24 news story, the seniority-rule snag in the Brian Schappert murder probe was not unique. In early 1988, several officers refused overtime to help make arrests in a sting operation because they were "miffed" at not being privy to the undercover investigation. Smith is in a good position to know who was on the ball and who was not. He worked that case (a theft probe) as an agent for the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation.

What a miserable spectacle The Gazette's Dale Kueter depicted in Sunday's news story: Police force weakened by factionalism. Command officers hamstrung by union dogma and hotshot detectives. Impractical seniority rules stubbornly embraced by union leaders. "Changing the seniority rules," said chief steward Darwin Ammeter, "is something we would not agree to."

Ammeter, a detective, denigrates the violent-crimes task force organized two years ago to avoid the painfully slow call-in procedure set forth in the union contract seniority provisions. (The task force has been out of action lately.)

That's not surprising. Ammeter has had a longtime role in organizing the police and leading them into association with the Teamsters. But he also said former police chief Gary Hinzman lined up the violent-crimes task force "to maneuver around the contract and make jobs available to his friends."

What a crass thing to say! Here is a community troubled by three unsolved violent crimes in the last 10 months. And here are four safety commissioner candidates — Smith, incumbent Bob Jaeger, former commissioner Floyd Bergen, and Hurley Bassett Jr. — constructively discussing how to speed up investigations. And what does the union steward do but drag Hinzman's name through the mud again. He implies Hinzman put friendship before public safety. It is no way to help Ammeter's friend, former patrolman Jaeger (who fired Hinzman), take the high road in the campaign. The union chief steward's intemperate statement reminds the voters that the "nonpartisan" public safety race is really steeped in politics — the politics of organized labor.

Another worrisome police personnel development (brought to light by J.D. Smith) is the payment for overtime even if no overtime was worked. If a senior officer is bypassed for overtime duty, he later can file a grievance and seek payment for the time he could have worked.

City personnel records indicate at least six such cases since January 1988, four involving civilian employees at the police department.

Getting paid for not putting in the time? Nice work if you can get it. Or rather, nice pay if you can't get the work. We don't think the citizens of Cedar Rapids will sit still for that. Nor will they tolerate detectives' invoking of seniority rules to avoid overtime in homicide cases or sting operations. A police department is military in nature. It answers life-or-death situations. How ludicrous to insist the best-trained sleuths be allowed to snooze through some of the calls.

As the safety commissioner candidates have noted, seniority-rule changes must come at the negotiating table. But come they must. And the safety commissioner can't just sit there. As part of the "management" represented by the City Council, he must become the union's adversary — on this point, at least. He must insist negotiators for the city stress seniority-rule reform.

When the Teamsters began large-scale organizing of police forces 15 years ago, the International Brotherhood stressed, "Law enforcement first. . . . Union affiliation and responsibilities are secondary."

It's time to take them up on it.

Irving Berlin

IRVING BERLIN, writer of "White Christmas," "God Bless America" and 1,000 other songs, died Friday at 101. What a prodigious talent: never studied music; couldn't even read music.

Some eulogists say it's wonderful that Berlin, a "national treasure," could be with us practically all the 20th century.

That's wrong. He didn't want to live that long. And he hadn't written anything noteworthy since the mid-1960s. Having far outlived his generation, he didn't even acknowledge his 100th birthday. How sad.

It is enough to say Irving Berlin was a musical giant. His snappy, upbeat tunes will be part of the American fabric a long time — probably another 101 years.



LETTERS TO THE GAZETTE

Canney: 'Proven leadership' or 'jaded'

Twelve thousand new jobs in seven years! That's an enviable record.

And thanks to the efforts of many groups in our community, that's what has been accomplished since the recession of the early 1980s.

Business, labor, government, education and Chamber leaders all can share credit for this dramatic turnaround.

But somebody had to pull them together in order to get the job done, and that leader is Don Canney.

With 20 years of experience as mayor, Canney knows what it takes to attract new business and industry.

And he knows how to get the right people and organizations involved in the tedious process of developing a favorable climate for continued growth of this area's economy.

That's why it would be foolhardy to risk all of the gains of the past few years on an unproven candidate.

"New leadership" means nothing. In these times, it's PROVEN leadership that counts, and Mayor Canney's record of achievement deserves our support for another two-year term.

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LETTERS DEADLINE

To qualify for use before the city primary election Oct. 10, letters about candidates or issues must reach The Gazette's editorial department by Wednesday noon, Oct. 4. The shorter they are, the better their chance of appearing.

Contard's better ideas

For Mayor Don Canney, blind growth is the only standard of success.

Never mind the noise, traffic, the poisoning of Cedar Lake or the loss of virtually every local forest and prairie where we used to play as children.

Never mind crazy development that has scattered retail stores and all but killed our downtown. Bigger is better and jobs are everything.

Want to pave over some neighborhood or turn a stand of timber into a dump? No problem.

Count on Canney (and his "appointees for life") to help you make Cedar Rapids a little

more like some stinking city on the East Coast.

Also lost during Canney's reign is the trust and cooperation that is supposed to exist between leaders and the public.

The many personal reports (myself included) of Canney's rude and ill-mannered treatment show he's become jaded toward the public, while the fact that the public has increasingly had to take the city to court to keep from getting steamrolled by some mindless development plan shows Canney and his appointees only feel the need to respond to the needs of business.

I've met Chris Contard and I think we can reclaim our city by supporting him for mayor. Twenty years of government scandal, waste and callousness have made his ideas for getting the public to go to council meetings timely and necessary.

Contard's ideas for limiting the terms of appointees prove he wants our government to represent all of us, and his work as a recycler shows he knows the difference between the crude "development at any cost" we've been getting and the "quality" of development we must have to keep Cedar Rapids not just fully employed but livable.

Rob Johnson  
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Space both plentiful, accessible

By WILLIAM SAFIRE

WASHINGTON — The tectonic plates that underlie the American way of living are making loud, grinding noises.

Something big is going on in the real America that most of us who live inside urban beltways are missing: proximity is losing its power.

Last time the plates shifted was about four decades ago, when a scarcity of space in big cities and a yearning for home ownership led the postwar generation out to the suburbs.

Levittown, N.Y., led the way to the new life, followed by a boom in road building, autos, shopping centers.

This middle-class migration culminated in (a) the abandonment of much of the big city to the fearful rich and the crime-ridden poor, and (b) today's all-hours regional mall, which turns the spending of money into a family entertainment and transforms each suburb into a retailing Las Vegas. (We are what we buy: "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping.")

But the relentless expansion of "greater metropolitan areas" and the dreary widening of the franchise fringe need not be the wave of the future.

Economic reality is now working against that sprawl: we are making more people and God is not making more land near cities.

Era is over

The cost of land determines the cost of housing; suburban land has become too expensive to permit the building of the kind of housing most people can afford.

Mike Kaufman wrote a perceptive and sympathetic piece in Sunday's New York Times Magazine about William J. Levitt, the man who introduced mass production to housing and started the suburban revolution.

Now 82 and fighting financial setbacks, Bill Levitt (for whose company I flaked in my youth) knows the era of turning cheap potato fields into affordable suburban homes is long gone.

As our population grows by 3 million a year, where will the new families go? Back to the cities, or into suburban high-rises?



Bill Levitt says no; he envisions new cities, of 50,000 to 250,000 population, not bedroom communities or satellites or one-company towns but "primary employment towns" — balanced centers of several industries and varied housing, with schools and cultural amenities — located in what are now rural areas.

New towns?

The very phrase draws a horselaugh from embittered bureaucrats and planners.

That was the floperoo notion of the '60s, a utopian pipedream that became a developers' drain down which millions of taxpayer dollars were poured.

We tried that future and it didn't work.

But one reason the idea flopped was in its execution: the feds worked directly with developers rather than through localities, placing little emphasis on job creation.

A city is first and foremost a place of commerce.

The bigger reason was that new cities in the relative boondocks were an idea whose time had not yet come.

It did not make good business sense for a corporation to put its people and plant far from the center of executive action. Proximity, closeness.

concentration were all.

Along comes the computer, with the accounting brain centralized no matter where employees and inventories are; along comes teleconferencing, with the ability to communicate and manage face to face while thousands of miles apart; along comes the fax machine, and no need for messengers to fight city traffic.

Proximity is now superfluous; you can now be close without being near.

All the way

Suddenly it makes sense to put plants and executive offices where the living is easier and the cost of land much lower.

If "out of town" is the aim, why not all the way?

Retailers who don't need stores don't need urban headquarters; that's why L.L. Bean and Land's End do their mail-order business from places you never heard of.

Manufacturers who are end-running middlemen don't want to be near big department stores; that's why, in Martinsburg, W. Va., scores of "factory outlet" stores sell Ralph Lauren, Jonathan Logan and Adolfo goods at half-price to crowds of exurban shoppers.

Eighty miles from Washington and the place is packed; those customers are not all hicks.

Republicans in Washington are still uneasy about new cities, and Democrats worry about seeming to give up on old cities, which is why "planning" is a dirty word.

One day Congress will wake up and provide incentives to help rural county governments attract groups of core businesses.

No billions needed; just a sense of the dispersed, mid-sized urban future and the enthusiasm to facilitate it.

Look out your airplane window sometime; there's plenty of room down there.

With the new management technology and the old human need to breathe free, there's no longer a need to crowd together.

New York Times Service