Metro area leaders: Segregation not an issue

By Ron French / The Detroit News

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the racial makeup of the region as a whole. Meanwhile, there are 33 census tracts: the 2000 census with populations that are less than one-tenth of 1 percent white. "The facts are what they are," Archer said. "And I don't think it is something profoundly negative, as much as it is something that gives us more opportunities.

Macomb County's top elected leader, John Hertel, said his area's largely white makeup "is not viewed in a negative way, officially or unofficially, in the county. Hertel, who chairs the board of commissioners, cited Mt. Clemens and New Haven as examples of integrated communities that are healthy economically. "While the Afro-American population in Macomb County is not high," he said, "where they live ... is fine" in terms of safety and adequate housing. Wayne County Executive McNamara sees little wrong with segregated housing, which he calls "a way of life" in Metro Detroit. "People are more comfortable being with people like themselves," he said. Before becoming Wayne County's chief executive in 1986, McNamara was mayor of Livonia, a city that in the 2000 census was the whitest city of over 100,000 in America. "Blacks are just like whites," McNamara said. "They become affluent and they look for better housing. They can't find it in Detroit, and they head to Southfield, where lots of their families and friends are."

McNamara says he has seen this with his own African-American employees. "I had a driver who moved to the suburbs," McNamara said. "He found a home in Redford for $112,000 that probably would have cost him $160,000 in Livonia. Why should an individual pay $50,000 or $60,000 more to live in a community that is ethnically different than they are, and maybe not feel as comfortable?"

McNamara says it is not the function of government to try to influence where people live. Patterson, the veteran chief executive of Oakland County, said he believes segregation today "doesn't mean anything in a negative way.

"Communities grow up and take their own identity," Patterson said. "For a host of reasons, Detroit has become a predominantly black city. "

Ed McNamara Wayne County executive
to race.

"I think this guy (Hubbard) would spin in his grave if he knew how many non-
Caucasians have moved into his city," McNamara said.

But there is a different political climate today. Politicians can lose no matter w
they say about race, said Lyke Thompson, political science professor at Wayne S
University.

"Most politicians in this area have been elected from a segregated constituency
Thompson said. "From those elected from either an Anglo-American or African-
American constituency, they have to be willing to challenge that constituency's b
if they're going to promote residential integration. That takes a lot of courage. In
years of following Detroit politics, I have not seen politicians in segregated citi:
promoting residential integration."

N. Charles Anderson, president of the Detroit Urban League, doesn't see many
Metro Detroit politicians pay much attention to segregated housing. "Are they
concerned about it? I'm certain they are. But it is not something that has been hig
on their list."

The result of ignoring it is the continuation of segregation through another
generation, Anderson said.

"It's good that we're beginning to be able to live anywhere we want to live,"
Anderson said. "But there's still a challenge when people move depending on w:
their neighbors are. I think some people choose to live where they believe they're
going to be more comfortable."

And because they're more comfortable living apart, the blacks and whites are k
"only with the stereotypes of the unknown."