

NATTERING NABOBS OF NEGATIVISM

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Last month I celebrated my fifth anniversary in Hopkinsville, and that marks a natural moment to reflect on changes which have occurred during that time. Tonight I want to reflect on the economic and business changes that have taken place in Hopkinsville during this five years. In fact it might be useful for all who live here to reflect on these changes, since it sometimes seems that Spiro Agnew was referring to us when he coined his phrase "nattering nabobs of negativism."

How many conversations have you participated in that focused on what was wrong about Hopkinsville? That concerned failures and shortcomings? That highlighted a dismal present and declining future? That carefully enumerated precisely who was at fault from among those not present while silently adding the names of your current companions. After all, nothing of consequence has happened in Hopkinsville since the Breathitt administration, right?

Well, the nattering nabobs of negativism are wrong. Hopkinsville is a good city, getting better. We have had to deal with the tribulations of a declining agricultural economy which is none of our fault; and we have persevered; and we have progressed; and we will continue to go forward. And when next you hear a nabob saying how bad things are, ask him to pick a sector of our economy for further discussion. Perhaps shopping centers.

The nabobs will be quick to site the Mall, its checkered progress under the auspices of its current owners and unfavorably compare it to plans in Clarksville. They miss an important part of the story.

Skyline Shopping Center received an important renovation. The Kroger Center was built, hiring more people than most industrial plants. Brickyard Plaza was added to the north side of town. These are not trivial additions. They represent millions of dollars invested in Hopkinsville's future. Millions that were invested during the last five years.

Fast food - fast growth. We've got special sauce, special cheese, pickles, lettuce on a sesame seed bun; the best cookin' in town, up and down all around, and you ask "Where's Herb?" Right here running the city.

Now nabobs will be quick to denigrate both the quality of the food and the quality of the jobs at our new additions; McDonalds, Hardys', Arby's, Beefy's, Burger King and Dairy Queen. These are probably the same people who complain that there are no jobs for our kids graduating from high school to keep them in town, and that kids these days do not know how to work.

The truth is that a "fast food joint" provides nearly ideal entry level employment. Lets look at the lessons these businesses teach new employees Attention to detail. The same lesson taught by the Army but without basic training. These restaurants are cleaned not daily but continually; they are functionally designed and well maintained. Quality control. They deliver a uniform and predictable product every day in every location. Marketing. Try to order a soft drink and a burger,

and you will hear "Would you like some french fries with your meal," or "Have you tried our new stuffed potato?" How many businessmen wish their people did as good a job selling their products?

The downtown area. A confirmed nabob may point out the failure to get the Sixth Street project started and the inability to develop the New Central Hotel. That of course is grasping at straws. In the last five years our downtown area has improved while most city's declined. Bartholomews, Market on Main, Harry Boyd, The Butcher Block, Hilliard and Lyons, the fire-station clock, Auto Shack, the Memorial Building, Harry Boyd, the Depot, Virginia Park, Planters Bank, Grace Church, The Moayon Building, Cobbler's Last, the Hall of Justice, Church's Fried Chicken, the Alhambra, Harry Boyd. For anyone to be anything but enthusiastic about our downtown defies belief.

And what of industry? Plants are being closed and workers are being laid off, do you say? Of course. The creative destruction of jobs is a natural part of a changing economy. Jobs are not being lost, however, they are being replaced. And each plant that has closed has been reopened.

Here is a scorecard for the last five years. White Hydraulics moved to Hopkinsville and then built an expansion. Pellon has had two expansions. International Paper built a new plant. Wayne Feeds built a new plant. Dunlap Sales has expanded. Phil Mullins built a speculative warehouse and then expanded it. U.S. Tobacco has expanded. Thomas Industries transferred jobs to Hopkinsville. C&F Stamping has expanded and

has even stayed in business. Ebonite continues to grow. Flynn Enterprises gives every appearance of having added more jobs than the entire United States apparel trade. Over \$10 million in industrial revenue bonds have been issued to help finance a portion of this growth.

And is that all? Of course not. First City's new branch. Channel 43. Western Hills Golf Course. Airport additions. Physicians Clinic, Trover Clinic, the Mormon Church, Grandma's Kitchen and Truck Stop. Laurel Cove, Cottonwood, Driftwood, Slate Run and Oak Tree Villa. Christian Homes. Growth has been widespread and has contributed to a 15% growth in payroll tax receipts last year.

But what of the future? Hopkinsville's local economy is heavily influenced by the national economy. We are now in the fourth year of national economic expansion, and that makes this period of growth longer than the average expansion since World War II. But there are no indications that the expansion is about to succumb to old age. On the contrary, the continued downward pressure on oil prices provides every hope for lower inflation, lower interest rates and improved growth opportunities.

A dedicated nabob will never believe that Hopkinsville could share in the national prosperity, always asking the question "Why would anyone want to move here?" There are lots of reasons: Hopkinsville is strategically located close to the economic center of the United States; we have a post agricultural economy with a labor force having high levels of manual dexterity and a healthy regard for the work ethic; we have a low cost of doing business;

our recent record with unions is well regarded; and finally, Hopkinsville is a nice place to live.

Just a few years ago it was common to talk about how unattractive Hopkinsville was. But the improvements in the last few years have been dramatic. A banker from Paducah visited us for the first time in several years and was so impressed that he wanted to know what we were doing to make Hopkinsville look so good. An industrial site locator completed a tour of ten potential locations for a plant, and confided that Hopkinsville would be the best place for the plant's management to live. There is a burgeoning pride in Hopkinsville that can be seen by outsiders comparing us to other cities.

This helps explain why we have such favorable indications for the coming year. Already we have plans for two new mini warehouses, one on Ft. Campbell Blvd and one on the Pembroke Road. Shoney's is scheduled to build a new restaurant and Harveys a renovated department store. The Skyline II and Echo III hotel/motel developments are moving forward, and K-mart is building a new shopping center. Flynn Enterprises has announced intentions to hire 100 new employees and has plans for an eventual expansion involving as many as 400 jobs. A new battalion is being added at Ft. Campbell.

By themselves, these announced developments would make 1986 a favorable year for economic growth. But it is possible we will do considerably better. There are currently at least seven different good prospects for six different industrial sites. Anyone who had the most remote dealings with Sabatasso Pizza knows that there can be a long distance between being a prospect and being a taxpayer.



Nonetheless, when the president of the Industrial Foundation was asked which he would rather have, our prospects or one 400 employee plant, he chose the prospects.

Hopkinsville is making progress. We are moving forward. The nattering nabobs of negativism can get out of town. The probitious propraetors of positivism are coming in.