

# Reader forum

## Daily fee courses react to Dr. Hurdzan's column

We imagine that you have received plenty of replies to Michael Hurdzan's article in your November, 1979 issue. Our members were very concerned over his views. We represent the nearly 800 daily fee golf courses in Michigan and Ohio, golf courses that are privately owned, tax paying, free enterprises.

Dr. Hurdzan evidently has a very slanted and misguided opinion of the daily fee golf industry. Some typical comments from our membership:

- ★ When government finances and operates a golf course, few benefit, except:
  1. The architects like Dr. Hurdzan who want their hands in the public trough for huge fees.
  2. About two percent of the population who will use the facility frequently.
- ★ The "More bread and circuses" syndrome destroyed Rome, and the circus architects of that time were probably crying for more government spending for

circuses.

- ★ Maybe we should use government money to put more golf course architects in business, thereby creating more competition and get their fees lowered. We're sure Dr. Hurdzan would like that idea.
- ★ Dr. Hurdzan's article mentions a cost of \$4.00 for green fees at municipal courses, then states that the profits produced will build ball fields, etc. We fail to see parks departments or government golf courses producing profits. As a matter of fact, we see most government operated courses experiencing far higher operating costs than comparable privately managed facilities. The reason is generally due to civil servant employees and lack of more cost conscious management found in the private sector. In many instances parks departments will declare profitability, but ignore many expenses such as insurance, fuel, utilities, or water, part or all of which may be buried in other expense budgets or departments.

- ★ In Michigan and Ohio, an area that contains more daily fee golf courses than any other part of the U.S., the majority of these facilities have some type of programs oriented toward public service, including golf for the high schools, junior golf and free golf clinics, and also charitable golf tournaments and events. They do all of this in spite of the fact that they pay taxes and contributed to the well being of the community.

- ★ For a government entity to even think about going out and spending \$1.5 million tax dollars for a facility to compete with private enterprise is very, very disturbing. If anyone feels that the government is so efficient at owning and operating businesses, he should look at the railroads, post office, or Great Britain.

We noted several comments in a Letter to the Editor in the same November issue of **GOLF BUSINESS** that would seem pertinent, such as:

"The only circumstances in which such a recreational facility should be allowed to operate at a loss is when a very large segment of the public benefits from the service.

"Not only do I have to compete to support my investment in a game in which the competitor can lose until I am defeated, but I have to pay taxes to support him."

It seems ridiculous for government to continue raising taxes on privately owned public

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golf courses until they are taxed out of business, then build a competing municipal facility that pays no taxes at all, in fact, puts a drain on the public budget. Our country became great under the free enterprise system. Even Chrysler Corporation made it through the depression under free enterprise; but our current system of government spending (taxation) and controls is taking its toll.

We hope your magazine will devote some space to the point of view of the free enterprise daily fee golf industry.

Jeff Hoag

Michigan Association of Public Golf

**Courses**

Keith Maffitt

Ohio Association of Public Golf Courses.

I just cannot believe that you would allocate one full page to Dr. Michael J. Hurdzan's trash.

He may be a Ph.D., but he has the common sense mentality of an idiot.

According to Dr. Hans S. Sennholz, Chairman of the Department of Economics at Grove City College, Grove City, Pa., "The concerned entrepreneur who wishes to fulfill his mission

in the world must become a dealer in ideas, an educator who teaches how to think, to refute errors and impart virtues. To neglect the important field of ideas is to place in jeopardy his very existence. For while opportunities still exist for the innovator, it is today's leaders of business who, by their misguided pronouncements and actions, are helping to undermine the free market system which permits the individual entrepreneur to flourish."

I have never heard of Dr. Hurdzan. He is a theorist. I own a golf course in the Charlotte, N.C. area. The Charlotte city-owned golf course loses \$100,000 per year. The Gastonia Municipal golf course loses more than \$120,000. According to Mr. Bob Prozan (page 30 **GOLF BUSINESS**, (Nov. 1979) Huntsville, Alabama Municipal golf course loses more than \$120,000 excluding freebees. Dr. Hurdzan must also be an economic moron. How long does he think that the federal government and the local governments will be able to confiscate monies from citizens. The day of reckoning is rapidly approaching. Proposition 13 is only a mild signal portending lots of difficulties.

Practically speaking, all governments:

- 1—Create nothing
- 2—Obtain their operating revenues from taxation or licensing or any form of confiscation.
- 3—Enterprises are abject failures.

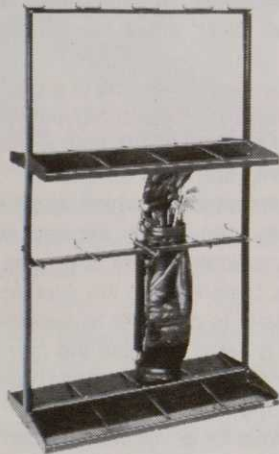
These three items are facts. Now people want the government to run the oil business. How could the government possibly run anything when it loses billions operating the monopoly of the post office.

Now back to Dr. Hurdzan's article. His statement "our factitious golf course may net from \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year" is fiction. In your November 1979 issue, in the "For Sale" classifieds, a complete golf course with equipment, club house, pool, tennis courts, etc., can be purchased for \$650,000 asking price. Dr. Hurdzan's article is a "con" game. He needs a job and is trying to develop business with utterly ridiculous pronouncements. I repeat — he is a dreamer. And I repeat, how did you allow yourself to be conned into allocating one page to his article.

Ed Osinski  
Norristown, PA

I was downright mad when I read the socialist ranting of Markist Ph.D., Michael Hurdzan in the November issue, but then I turned the page and read some good American common sense by letters from J.R. Hall III and Bob Prozan.

Why give socialists like Hurdzan all that free space to promote their anti-American ideology? Let him buy his own magazine. Obviously he doesn't know or chooses to ignore the fact that nothing in the Constitution gives hordes of bureaucrats or gangs of politicians the right to take dollars from tax payers to build golf courses. When he says "private owners. . . are concerned about their own personal gains", he cleverly neglects to men-



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tion that architects are "in on" the loot in the Public designs. His phrases: "belongs to the people" and "a game of the masses" clearly identify his philosophy.

Congratulations for printing the "right" side in the two letters by Hall and Prozan. Prozan is right on the nail when he says "we pay taxes to support him".

Andrew J. Watson, President  
ECCO, Inc.

### An open letter from Dr. Hurdzan

Thank you for your readership, your enthusiasm for golf, and your efforts to express your thoughts on the industry. This column was intended to be a written dialogue and the printing of your letters makes it so. However, rather than condemning Mr. Morris and GOLF BUSINESS, I should think that you would rather thank him for the opportunity to read and express a different point of view.

As to your personal disagreements with my perceptions of the golf business, I would like to address those by reiterating my main points again on government golf. First, golf course construction is stagnating because many private and corporate investors feel the return does not justify the investment. Proof of this is that according to National Golf Foundation

statistics only 62 golf courses had opened through the end of September for 1979 and their figures show only about 80 to open in 1980 (this is down considerably from the 350-400 golf courses per year of a few years ago). Of those 62, a high percentage were government golf courses. Consider also that we have no way of knowing how many golf courses may have closed last year. However, it should be clear that the net effect is that the hundreds of golf superintendents who graduate each year and the hundreds of apprentice golf pros will find it increasingly harder to find a position if golf continues to slow down, not to mention the impact on all golf suppliers.

Also remember that government intrusion into the golf market started back about 85 years ago when James Roosevelt, New York City Park Commissioner, built the **first** public golf course in America. Van Cortland Park was built in 1895 and every golf course built before that time was for the private wealthy interests.

As for the free enterprise system, I can only say that I have owned four businesses of my own. But it is not infallible. If greens fees were to be set at the discretion of the individual who was strongly profit motivated, then this price may deny many the opportunity to experience golf. My father grew up in a coal camp in West Virginia during the depression, and the municipal golf courses there were his only chance as a boy to caddy or work to earn money for his family. His exposure to golf gave him a chance to get out of a life in the mines,

and his golfing ability that he learned has benefited him for the past 50 years. Had those government supported golf courses not existed during that time and throughout the 40's, 50's, 60's and 70's, he and many other people would have been economically denied the benefits and pleasures of golf.

I assure you that I am of the same political persuasion as you except that I see problems with a strict free enterprise system. Witness the high profits of the oil companies while many Americans must decide to "eat or heat".

Lastly, I do not believe that every municipal golf course should make money nor should they be a tax drain. If a government golf course has such a deplorable income record, then an outside consultant should be retained to study and revise the management system. However, it is the purpose of government to provide for the health, safety and welfare of its constituents and this includes recreation. Whether it is ball fields and picnic areas, public hunting, fishing, boat ramps or camping sites, it is imperative that recreation be provided for all people regardless of their backgrounds or economic situation.

Thank you again for your interest on the subject for I believe we are both concerned about the game; we just have different perceptions.

Michael J. Hurdzan

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