

# editorial opinion

## A runs 'Blue' program, but B pays all the bills

Blue Cross rates are going up again—more than 25 per cent this year.

In the past three years, Blue Cross rate increases have far exceeded the cost of living increases in the state and nation—which have themselves been incredible.

Somebody has to tell Blue Cross it either has to reduce some of its programs or do a better job controlling costs in hospitals.

Cost increases at the rates we have seen in the Blues over the last three years, if continued, will destroy private medical health care and lead us into some sort of national program.

It's a proven fact that government, with its bureaucracies, is never as cost-efficient as private enterprise, but it certainly can't do worse than what is happening in the medical care field today.

**THERE IS A NAGGING** question of why Blue Cross is allowing its costs to get out of hand, but it shouldn't nag for too long when we see the composition of the Michigan Blue Cross board of directors, who set policy for the programs.

It has a 48-person board. There are seven doctors of medicine and two doctors of osteopathy, eight hospital administrators, one pharmacist, one nurse plus two Blue Cross officials. This makes up almost 44 per cent of the board.

It's a bit better than the old days, when more than half the board members were medical people but it is still a problem.

**THE PEOPLE** in this category on the board are not necessarily interested in reducing rates. They are the people who profit from increased medical costs.

In addition to these medically-oriented people, there are five representatives from labor unions, which is a little more than 10 per cent of the board. These union representatives are interested in better programs for their constituencies. They do not have to pay the bill, nor do their members have to pay the bill. The employers of their members pay the bill.

Together these two groups represent more than 50 per cent of the board. So who is sitting on the board to protect the interest of the employees—who are paying the bill—or of the individuals who are not part of group plans?

**WELL, THERE ARE FIVE** persons on the board representing foundations. And there are another four representing colleges and universities. Certainly these people are not going to spend many sleepless nights trying to hold down medical costs.

### Yes, Fr. M'am

They had a prayer breakfast in a community hall far from here recently, and on the program was this living "Scripture Reading: Old Testament—Mrs. Rev. John Smith, Pastor, St. Catholic Church."

It made you wonder: Did a priest not only get married but have his wife ordained as well?

## Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

Of the 48 members of the board, who would really be interested in setting medical policy to hold costs down?

There are seven representatives from large industrial businesses, three representatives from smaller businesses, two bankers and a housewife. They are 27 per cent of the board.

Is there any question in anyone's mind as to why health care insurance premiums will continue to rise in the future faster than the cost of living?

## Parks aren't sacred any more

"Parks are like motherhood. How can you be against them?" asked E. Frank Richardson, chairman of the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission.

For increasing numbers of folks, it's easy to be against parks. In 1971, Oakland voters gave more than 2-1 approval to renewal of a quarter-mill property tax for the park system.

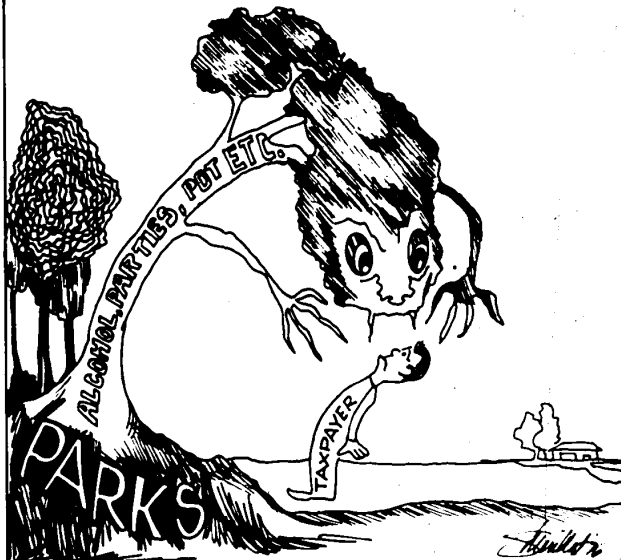
Five years later, with a more developed system and with more persons having used the parks, the voters' margin was down. Voters May 18 gave the ballot proposal only 58 per cent support.

It was—and is—the possibility of fellow Observer & Eccentric editor and myself that the parks millage is a good deal and that voters were correct in approving it. But we cannot be blind to the sad fact that parks aren't as popular with taxpayers as they used to be; that they are no longer in the same class as motherhood, the flag and apple pie. Actually, motherhood is no longer as popular as it used to be—but that is another matter.

**IN PART**, one can point to the fact we're suffering from the lingering effects of a recession, and taxpayers tend to be tight-fisted with their remaining bucks.

But it's even more significant that parks have been getting a lot of bad publicity. True, the Oakland park system hasn't had the kinds of problems other systems have suffered with, but such fine distinctions get blurred in voters' minds.

Several state parks now ban alcohol in any shape or form. Others have banned persons wanting to visit campers. Put plainly, there have been problems with some young people, rowdiness, late-night partying, substance abuse, bad lan-



Tim Richard

guage uttered at the tops of the lungs that kind of thing. Oakland residents are familiar with the kinds of problems encountered in neighboring Wayne County's lovely Hines Parkway, along the Middle Rouge River. The Horseshoe, Whiskey Hill, mobs, beefed-up park patrols. The news spreads.

**THERE MAY BE** a message to Oakland County

## The journalist as 'star'—it's not good for the trade

There's something strange going on inside the trade of journalism. Strange, yes, and important enough to justify a violation of the journalist's usual code of public silence about the inner workings of the trade.

Consider the following events: •Barbara Walters signs a uniquely lucrative contract to co-anchor the ABC-TV network evening news show for a million bucks a year for five years. A competent newswoman has become a highly-valued entertainment property.

•Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein gain great acclaim with their book on the breaking of the Watergate story, "All the President's Men." The movie version is equally successful, generating as a by-product, added velocity to the cult of the investigative reporter. Woodward (as they are now collectively known) then write another much-publicized book about the last days of the Nixon Administration which uses very dubious reporting methods to give a spurious sense of omniscience to their descriptions. Good reporting has become novel writing.

•Ohio Congressman Wayne Hays is charged in a story, first run by the Washington Post, with putting his mistress on the public payroll in the House of Representatives. Hays responds by saying the Post is out to get him because he made some prior remarks about the collective living arrangements of former TV personality Sally Quinn and Post editor Ben Bradlee. News judgment has become infected with charges of personal vendettas.

**WHAT HAS HAPPENED**, I fear, in the post-Watergate world is that the press collectively and journalists individually have become culture heroes.

The press has become the symbol for shining incorruptibility and infallibility. Reporters, especially of the investigative sort, have become the new knights in shining armor, riding off in all directions to do battle with a system which is deemed by definition as corrupt. Editors have become the generals of the forces of good, arraying their staffs in battle against evil throughout the land.

The press simply isn't infallible, when it starts thinking it is, it's getting a swollen head. Investigative reporting is a very valuable tool in an imperfect world, but reporters, in order to be good ones, need not endlessly skulk around dark corners always assuming the worst. Editors are not great sages for our age; they generally are harried people, trying to administer limited staff against the pressures of deadline, accuracy and ethics.

**FOR THE PRESS** to be seen as culture hero is not only inaccurate, it's dangerous presumption, because it carries with it the risk that the press will thereby become so tangled up in pre-occupations of ego and money and personality and power that it will start failing to do its real job.

Barbara Walters is a good newswoman, especially skilled at interview. But now that she has the ego trip of \$1 million a year to contend with, she's going to have to find that million dollar super-story every night. That's going to do something to her judgment of the news.

Woodstein jointly are good investigative reporters who did this country an immense service by

officials in the relatively small margin of victory May 18.

The opposition came from people in the northern reaches of the county—Citizens Against Park Expansion. For a tiny group without much dough they made a big noise about county plans. Logical constructive criticism may or may not have been their true motivation but they made it sound good.

The opposition lost the war, but it may have sent a message to the parks and recreation commission in much the same way the anti-war demonstrators failed to get us out of Vietnam but made certain no future president will ever get us into that kind of undeclared war.

The message is that the public won't go for a tax-supported park system that gets too far away from a pastoral setting. I think the commission is smart enough to learn the lesson.

## Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER

tracking down the spiral horror of the Nixon drama. But now they have to contend with publicists for their new book and negotiations with tycoons for the cinema contract for the script and God knows what else. If the proper environment for a good investigative reporter is a certain measure of faceless anonymity, Woodstein's days as good investigative reporters are over.

Ben Bradlee and Sally Quinn are very competent newspaper people. But Bradlee has taken on elements of a movie star-myth, and Sally Quinn had a fling at becoming a TV personality.

They have moved out of the shade of being simple newsmen trying to do their best to report the news as it happens. They have moved into the glare of public figuration in which general interest in gossip jeopardizes the integrity of news judgment.

**THE MAJOR STORY** of this political year will almost surely turn out to be the power of the news media in making and breaking candidates for president.

The press nearly un-made Ronald Reagan's campaign when it reported his loss in New Hampshire as "a defeat" when it wasn't, then it did the same thing to President Ford when it endlessly and irrelevantly ran pictures of him falling down and bumping into things.

But the press is certainly not prepared—or should it be—for political power. As Richard Reeves has pointed out, the press is like a "loveable little child." It has trouble concentrating on more than one thing at a time. It is not an institution consciously and consistently dedicated to accumulating the exercise of control over other institutions or other people's lives.

But the culture hero role in which the press finds itself pushed it toward even more power. The worst thing that could ever happen to journalism in this country is that it and the people in it begin to get too big for their britches, forgetting their own fallibility and their essentially modest role in the processes of society.

**WE ARE TRADERSMEN**, not professionals, and we run enormous risks if we forget it.

Nat Hentoff, a good and tough writer, expressed the point well in recent movie review of "All the President's Men."

The set is "a world without shadow. With hard, hard poster colors. Nothing is hidden, everything is exposed all the time: a merciless kind of hard light."



## The Stroller...

### Memorial Days of long ago

by W. W. EDGAR

As sometimes happens, The Stroller dumped down in his easy chair the other evening, dozed off a bit, and had one of those remarkable dreams he has had in quite a while.

What he could hear the blaring of the horns, and then the muffled drums, he dreamed he was back home on Memorial Day, standing on the curb watching his grandfather, "The Colonel," commander of the Grand Army Post, leading the parade on an old black horse and conducting the solemn ceremonies of placing flowers on the graves in the cemetery.

When he awakened, The Stroller had to smother at the recollection of "The Colonel," snuffing his stuff. It was not the very day in the year in which he looked forward with great pride. It was his day, and proudly wearing his army blues with the black velvet hat and the gold braid, he made the most of it.

**MEMORIAL DAY** ceremonies have changed a great deal in the past decade or two. Today, in many communities there is a short parade, a small gathering in the city park to listen to some patriotic speaker, and then the children, in the full earnest, parade grounds, auto races, baseball field and horse park.

It wasn't like that in the old days when we still had the veterans of the Civil War

with us. We turned the whole day over to them.

There would be the usual parade, back home, then a walk over the bridge, stop parade a while to drop flowers into the Lehigh River to pay tribute to the sailors who gave their lives in the war between the states, and then on to the cemetery for the main tribute.

**IT WAS AT THE** chapel in the cemetery on the hill overlooking our little town that "The Colonel" really put on a show. He handled the ceremonies masterfully while one of the school children, sonner of an oratorical contest, recited Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Following that, he showed the way while placing flowers on the graves—ones on row—old his departed comrades.

Few in the gathering ever realized it but there was a lot of palauze between "The Colonel" and his predecessor, Capt. Joseph Matchette, a kindly, old man with a long white beard, and "The Colonel" used this day to enrich his ego.

It seems that when Capt. Matchette was elevated in rank, he was in a hospital recuperating from wounds. And The Stroller's grandfather, never one to name wounds, claimed that the wounded man never had been on the firing line.

For that reason, "Grandpa" disgraced himself as "Colonel," and he nursed the rivalry until the day he died.

The dispute reached a peak one year when he defeated Capt. Matchette for the office of post commander, thus earning the right to lead the Memorial Day parade.

For years, Capt. Matchette had led the parade on a prancing white horse. That year, however, when "The Colonel" reported at the riding stable expecting to get the white horse, he was told that it was the property of Capt. Matchette. Moreover, he was told the only horse available was a forlorn looking black one. He protested and protested but to no avail.

It so happened the route of the parade called for a left turn off the main street on to the bridge and then on to the cemetery. On this particular day, as he was making the turn on the old black horse, he looked back and saw Capt. Matchette and his white horse stumble.

To the amusement of all, and The Stroller in particular, "The Colonel" tumbled off the back of the captain and then rode on. It was an unusual moment, and the memory of it has lived through the years.

Now the veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic are gone. With their passing, Memorial Day seems to have changed. Veterans of our later wars—World War I and World War II—don't put as much emphasis on Memorial Day ceremonies. It's too bad, for it was a rare privilege to have walked and talked with the veterans of the GAR, the men who fought to save the Union.

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