



Tim Richard

Scholars get dollars but not respect

ALREADY THE 1984 election debate over national education policy is almost out of hand.

Candidates are focusing on solutions. The Reagan Administration opts for tougher state requirements and merit pay. Democrats Mondale and Hollings are for more money, more money, more money.

But as I pore through "A Nation at Risk," the devastating report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education that stirred the debate, I get an entirely different reading.

Education has indeed been a high American priority, judging solely from governmental budgets. Total governmental spending — federal, state and local — last year amounted to \$215 billion versus \$179 billion for national defense. As taxpayers, Americans have been generous to education.

BUT AS INDIVIDUALS, well, one has to wonder about the importance of education in the ordinary American's scheme of things.

One of my most mind-boggling travel experiences was not seeing the Alhambra or Westminster Abbey but the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland.

An entire floor of that building was devoted to pictures of scholars. Honestly, scholars, people who contributed stories and ideas and inventions. Many names escape me now, but I recollect that some of the greatest minds who worked in the English language were Scots — James Watt of steam engine fame; Robert Louis Stevenson of poems and novels; Adam Smith, the philosopher who practically instituted economics; David Hume, historian and metaphysician; Thomas Carlyle, Sir Walter Scott, dozens more.

The Scots honored scholars. Remember Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof" and his song "If I Were a Rich Man"? Why did he want to be rich? So he could join an Oakland County country club or vacation in Traverse City? No. A rich man would have time to go to the temple and discuss scriptures with the scholars.

THE NATIONAL Commission on Excellence in Education makes a strong case that student performance in virtually all academic areas has fallen steadily for a generation, adding this chilling comment:

"Nevertheless, the average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school and college."

This has happened despite higher property taxes, higher tuition, a new federal Department of Education and generous tax breaks for personal educational expenses. Why?

Do we, as 220 million individuals, honor the scholar as did the Scots and Tevye or do we honor the "with it" person?

Do we honor "duty" or "doing your own thing"?

Do we choose to read about TV "personalities" or outstanding "characters"?

Around the kids, do we praise self-denial and delayed rewards or say it's OK to do whatever you want as long as you don't harm somebody else? It's fashionable for politicians to flatter the general public — even the National Commission does so on page 16. I'm not running for office, so I can afford to try to tell the truth.

I strongly suspect Americans' support of education is financial and institutional, not personal. Until we as 220 million individuals honor the kid who reads and works rather than manipulates personalities, it matters little whether the Reagan philosophy or the Mondale-Hollings philosophy is at the federal helm.

'Not as well-educated . . .'



Milestones, from 6 to 80

AN ODD THING about growing old is that no one seems to care about one's age until he becomes an octogenarian.

This is being shown to The Stroller more and more every day since he was fortunate enough to have lived through more than four score years.

During his youth in the foothills of the Lehigh Mountains in Pennsylvania, when a youth reached the age of 6, he entered school and became exposed to what they called "book learning."

No more attention was paid to his age until he reached 14. In those days, no one was allowed to work in a factory until he passed his 14th birthday.

IF HE WERE fortunate enough to remain in school (a privilege denied The Stroller), the next milestone came at 16. That was the day he could graduate from wearing knee breeches, or "bloomers" as they were called, to the high status of long pants.

The Stroller never will forget his first appearance in the "men's" pants. Some of his closest friends threatened to strip him of them in public, though the threat was never carried out.

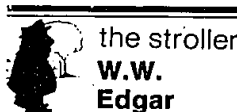
The next goal was his 21st birthday. That day he became a man, as they say — the day he earned the right to vote. And what a fuss they made of him when, accompanied by his mother as a witness, he cast his first vote.

Strangely, his age never seemed to bother anyone until he reached the four score milestone in life. Then, of a sudden, it seemed to be on everyone's mind. Even his best friends mentioned that he looked fine and healthy for one so old.

BUT IT WAS the family doctor who really made the most of the age subject.

Each time he had occasion to examine The Stroller — and that wasn't often — the doctor would look at him and say, "You are in great shape . . . Then he would hesitate and add, 'For a man your age.'"

At the conclusion of a recent regular physical checkup, the doctor said, "If you were 60 years old, I'd say you were in great shape. But at 86, I can't



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

think of the right word unless I would say 'excellent.'"

He didn't mention age at the moment. But before The Stroller left, the doctor took him by the arm and said, "But I want to warn you — at your age, anything could happen. So be careful. Take an aspirin tablet a few times a week. That will help to thin your blood and act as a preventative of blood clots and possible strokes. A man your age can't be too careful."

This was the first warning The Stroller was entering the danger zone.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION, he visited an eye specialist who recommended removal of a cataract. This was agreed upon.

When The Stroller asked how long he would be incapacitated, the answer was "about three weeks until you get your full vision back again — but in your case, because of your age, it may take a little longer."

Well, that was 11 months ago, his eye is still draining, and his vision is slightly impaired, especially in night driving. The doctor is puzzled and hints he will do a professional paper on it to present at the next convention.

Meanwhile, The Stroller has been called "The Iron Man of Journalism" and "the oldest working journalist in the state — if not the nation."

Strangely, his age was seldom mentioned from the time he cast his first vote more than 60 years ago until he reached octogenarian status.

The word "octogenarian" means a lot to him, and he plans to keep going at his present pace down the stretch to the finish line.



Bob Wisler

Government pay may be too good

AT BREAKFAST this week, an acquaintance who likes to discuss government and personal welfare sought my opinions on several issues.

What might happen to employees of the Wayne County Road Commission with County Executive William Lucas proposing to cut down on salaries and jobs, he asked.

The man was concerned. Several years ago he had, through friends in county government, helped secure jobs for two young relatives. "Between them, they're making \$60,000 a year, and the benefits are great. I hope nothing happens to their jobs," he said.

Understandable, I said. What do they do? It turns out that one drives a truck for a crew that repairs asphalt; the other works on a crew that maintains parks.

The same day, I wished a person well in a new job. The person was moving from a job in a private industry business to a government job at double the previous salary.

EXTREME EXAMPLES? Perhaps, but these kinds of things have been happening the past 10 or 20 years. And John Q. Citizen has become tired of hearing about them and is no longer in any mood to support them.

Government employment has become a good deal — in fact, a much better deal than employment in most other businesses or industries.

I can recall in my earlier years taking a clerical job with the city of Detroit. I learned early that most of my co-workers thought that the pay was too low but believed the security that the job offered and the benefits compensated.

Those were the days when school teachers were making less than \$5,000 a year but stuck with it because of job satisfactions. Many teachers weren't career employees but women who wanted to work a few years before raising a family. Turnover was high.

Governments always claimed they could not pay wages comparable to industry because they were dealing with tax dollars, which are limited.

THINGS CHANGED. Most employees become unionized, and real bargaining set in. The state law against strikes by public employees became an ignored statute. "Blue flu" was followed by every kind of flu imaginable.

We found that, indeed, governments and school districts could afford to pay more than they previously had maintained.

State legislatures became dominated by labor interests. Arbitration and political pressure played a part in increasing the wage and benefit packages of government employees.

And long ago we passed the point where government wages were lower than in private industry. In many instances, pension benefits for retirees are as costly as the wages and benefits paid to active workers.

TAXPAYERS NO LONGER are willing to shoulder the burden.

The Recall Blanchard movement manifests a dissatisfaction not only with the governor and the legislature that passed an income tax increase, but with all governments. The same dissatisfaction is evident when school tax increases are rejected as often as they are approved, during a time when there is national alarm about the state of education.

Hopefully, those on the receiving end of the taxpayers' money are making some concessions to the idea of conserving resources. This week, teachers in Livonia and Redford agreed to one-year wage freezes and 3- to 4-percent increases in the second and third years of new contracts.

These are welcome signs. The time has come for the pendulum to swing the other way.

Many say it's going to be the worst summer for allergies

HAVE YOU been sneezing? Do you have watery eyes?

If so, join the group. Those suffering from allergies are having a miserable summer. Many say it is the worst summer they've had in at least 10 years.

Local allergy doctors report a dramatic increase in the number of cases they have been treating. "Many patients are acutely sick this summer," said Dr. Ulrich Ringwald, a Rochester allergist who practices at Crittenton Hospital.

The villain is grass pollen. Usually, the time for allergic reactions to grass pollen is from about May 15 to June 15. But this year, the great amount of rainfall in late April and May delayed the grass pollen.

Rain meant grass grew higher and thicker than normal. The dryness of the past two weeks and windy conditions have put much grass pollen in the air. As a result, many people are today suffering from allergy symptoms.

APPROXIMATELY 10 percent of the population

suffers from allergic reactions to various substances. Basically, "allergy" means an altered capacity to react.

A thing to which a person reacts is called an allergen. An allergen is not usually harmful to most persons. There are thousands of allergens — foods, dusts, pollens, medicines and other chemicals.

Many myths have developed over the years about allergies.

For example, many people notice the white, fluffy stuff that is now blowing through the air. "That's what's causing my allergy problems," patients tell Dr. Robert Weinstein. He's chief of the allergy section at Southfield's Providence Hospital.

The white stuff comes from cottonwood trees and has nothing to do with allergy difficulties. "Grass pollen cannot be seen by the human eye," Weinstein said. "But there's tons of it blowing around right now."

Over the years, people suffering at this time of the year are said to have "rose fever." Because it coincides with the blooming of roses in spring. Ac-



Nick Sharkey

tually, grass pollen is causing the problem now, not roses.

From about Aug. 15 until the first frost, many allergy patients will suffer from what they will call "hay fever." Their problems will have nothing to do with hay but result from ragweed, which spreads its pollen in late summer and early fall.

Don't breathe a word of this to the "Say Yes to Michigan" committee, but this state is among the worst in the nation for allergy sufferers. Peculiar environmental conditions make this state and its neighbors subject to a high concentration of seasonal pollens.

WHAT DO YOU do if you have an allergy?

Stay inside, preferably in an air conditioned building.

If that is not possible, excellent medication is available at the local drug store. Many brands of antihistamines can be purchased.

"I advise patients to try different medicines, but use them cautiously," said Providence Hospital's Weinstein. "See what works best for you. If it agrees with you and does not make you sleepy, then that's what you should use."

Those who still have serious problems should contact a physician. A doctor can prescribe drugs not available over-the-counter. In some cases, allergy injections may be required.

Unfortunately, it won't be any better at the end of the summer when ragweed season begins.

"If it's as dry then as it is now, many persons will have serious problems," predicted Ulrich Ringwald.

It may be a long summer for those fighting allergies.