

points of view

Quality education must be guaranteed

WHILE WHITE water rafting in the wilderness of West Virginia last Saturday, you'd think education would be the last thing on my mind. After all, it was supposed to be a vacation.

Most everything of a workaday nature had left my mind, until our guide introduced himself. Jim has been a "weekend" white-water guide for more than 10 years, as he tried out a variety of permanent jobs in his hometown near Charleston. He drove buses and worked for government agencies.

His weekends are still spent on the river, but his weekdays are spent

with kids. He's a middle school principal for a rural school district in West Virginia, and has a special interest in U.S. history.

Between the excitement of rushing whitewater rapids, we discussed education in general and, more specifically, his district.

ALTHOUGH HE didn't complain, I heard about financial woes, from the \$700 the school is allocated for postage — which covers only the first 10 weeks of the year — to the \$900 allocated for the phone bill each year. As a principal, he has to worry more about the operation of the building than the way his teach-



Casey Hans

ers operate, or his students learn.

I told Jim that education was my beat, and that I covered Farmington schools. "I've heard of Farmington," he said. "They get written up in a lot of education journals."

Farmington is one of the lucky districts. It has financial resources to

offer new and innovative programs — ones that get national attention in the journals. Jim's district is not so lucky.

My discussion with him could have also occurred in Michigan, with any district that faces a lack of money for textbooks, or needed staff, or money to operate any extracurricular programs.

These are the districts without the lot of the draw — without the benefit of a wealthy tax base.

ONE OF the big issues in Michigan education circles, I told Jim, is how schools are financed, and the inequity in the way Michigan schools

are financed. The state Legislature is working on a fair way to correct the situation, offering a good public education to any child no matter where they live.

Even though Farmington schools stand to lose when the state "takes from the rich to give to the poor," officials here seem resigned to the idea that its going to happen. And they're squirreling away extra money, looking ahead.

Officials of other wealthy districts are more outspoken against equalization — saying they do not want to subsidize poorer districts and that the quality of education will suffer

overall. The status quo cannot continue, either in Michigan, West Virginia or any other state in our nation.

It's time for educators, legislators, parents, and other interested groups to band together for the sake of future generations. There must be change, not only in school financing, but a guaranteed quality education for all children.

We can no longer worry just about ourselves; while school principals like Jim worry about whether he can turn on the lights tomorrow.

We must light the way for each child, rich or poor.

Anti-smoking proponent placed in Hall of Heroes

THE BARBECUE came out from under wraps recently. Grilled half-Saturday night, sizzling burgers for Sunday lunch and then close out the weekend with some luscious pork chops.

Maybe it was all that charcoal-broiled smoke that fouled my thoughts about cigarettes the same way killer weeds foul the air about us.

To be blunt: I'm fuming about cigarette fumes. Or more accurately, about the tactics of those who try to induce a potentially deadly habit upon us.

You have heard that Northwest Airlines has banned smoking on all flights, a step beyond federal smoking bans on all domestic flights lasting less than two hours.

There are some good television advertisements promoting Northwest's ban. Unfortunately, the ads cost an advertising agency a multimillion-dollar account and sent scores of people into the streets without a job.

THE AGENCY that made the Northwest ad also had the Nabisco account. "Hid" is the operative word. In the wonderful world of corporate mergers, the same father figure pushes cigarettes and Nabisco



Rich Perlberg

I am anti-smoking and I lose patience quickly with so-called smokers' rights.

sweets. A smoking exec was not pleased by the Northwest ad so he punished the ad firm by pulling the Nabisco account. Remember that the ad firm did not have the cigarette accounts, and they presumably were doing a fine job promoting the Nabisco products.

But, hey, it's their company and they can get pipped if they want to. You know how irritable cigarette smokers can be.

But it burned me just a little bit more to read about the methodology of those menthol-flavored movers who earn their living selling an in-

sidious little weed that is, according to almost any objective observer, a killer. Trying to get people to smoke themselves to death must be a great way to earn a buck.

My disgust with the cigarette bulls of the world has brought state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, into my Hall of Heroes for the week.

Faxon isn't sponsoring all of the anti-smoking bills now before the state legislature, but he backs them all and is perhaps Lansing's most visible opponent of this filthy habit.

The latest package of bills covers a gamut of areas: prohibiting free distribution of cigarettes, creating smoke-free schools and child-care centers, and toughening laws prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors.

Hooray for Faxon. I am not an anti-smoker person. Some of my best friends smoke. Some of them have a terrible time quitting. It's an addictive weed and it kills people.

I am anti-smoking, and I lose patience quickly with so-called smokers' rights. What are they talking about? The right to leave cigarette burns on my furniture? The right to make my clothes stink of smoke? The right to threaten my health?

Or is it merely the right to fire an advertising firm for doing its job?

We need to stabilize the rates for college tuition

BOB BOWMAN, the fast-thinking, fast-talking economic guru of Gov. Blanchard's administration, was a little unhappy with my question about double-digit tuition rates last week.

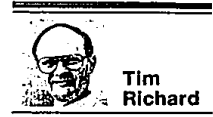
It seems that the University of Michigan is projecting just that, citing the almost flat level of state aid coming out of Lansing. What's more, other colleges are talking about tuition increases in the 10-15 percent range.

As we raced down the corridor of Southfield-Lathrup High to the gym where 2,000 parents with small kids were waiting to ask about the state's new tuition investment program, Bowman replied we wouldn't get double-digit tuition increases every year, some years it may be only 3 percent.

"Over the long haul," Bowman holds, the Michigan Education Trust investment could earn a higher rate of return (10 percent compound) than tuition increases (8-7 percent). Today's \$4,400 investment in 18 years will pay a kid's \$28,000 for four years of college.

ONE FATHER, a bit bitter, asked Bowman much the same question. U-M, he said, is assessing students "computer fees" whether or not they use computers, and next it will be charging "walking on the grass" fees. Will these fees be covered by the education trust program?

Yes, said Bowman, all mandatory



Tim Richard

fees will be covered. But then the cool state treasurer exploded at 15 state colleges and universities.

"It's incomprehensible to me why tuition has to go up at three times the rate of inflation," he said, calling on all parents — not just parents of 18-year-olds — to start watchdogging the colleges.

Lots of luck, everyone.

STATE COLLEGES get their operating money from two major sources — state aid and tuition.

When I started college back in the Eisenhower golden age, a person earning the minimum wage worked 106 hours to earn U-M tuition. Today it takes about 300 hours. That's a terrible price.

First, colleges don't use the consumer price index. They use HEPI, the higher education price index, because they spend big chunks of their budgets on personnel, medical benefits and utilities. The latter two items have been soaring in the last decade.

Second, state aid hasn't kept pace with the CPI, HEPI or anything else.

For two decades, the Legislature put less and less into education, more and more into social services.

Blanchard tried to reverse that. For the first five years, his budgets provided hefty increases in state aid to education at all levels. This year, for some reason, the education money trend flattened out.

WE CAN'T BLAME unemployment. April joblessness dropped to 7.4 percent, a full 1 percent below April 1987. There are 105,000 more people at work, paying taxes, than a year ago.

Where's the money going? Well, the House Appropriations Committee has added \$21.4 million to Blanchard's social services budget for higher welfare caseload projections. Blanchard proposed 16 cost-containment measures totaling \$52 million, and the House panel rejected most.

That's where our tax money is going.

OUR STATE constitution has something called the Headlee tax limitation amendment. It applies to taxes, not college tuition and fees. Tough luck, parents and students.

Michigan has done a good thing by offering a tuition investment program, where parents can guarantee to cover four years of college tuition.

But the state would do a better thing if it could stabilize tuition rates.

Michigan needs tuition limitation.

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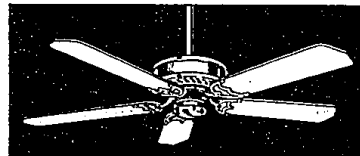
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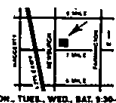
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