

points of view

Big tuition hikes threaten college trust plan

IF I KNOW Jim Blanchard, the governor was steaming when he learned about the 10 percent to 19 percent tuition increases some Michigan universities will impose in fall.

And if I know Bob Bowman, the state treasurer was livid.

It's more than the mere size of the increases that students will pay for higher education this Labor Day. The Michigan Education Trust — Blanchard-Bowman's pride and joy — is at risk.

THIS PREPAID tuition program, which opened enrollment last week, is based on two statistical assumptions:

• The MET fund, invested in stocks, bonds and annuities, will earn 9 percent or more, compounded

between now and when your young one starts college.

• Tuitions will rise 9 percent this year and an average of 7½ percent annually thereafter.

So when university boards raised them an average of 13.7 percent late in July, Blanchard-Bowman blew their collective stack. "You have to wonder what planet they (trustees) are from," they said, echoing each other's words.

By last week, they were trying to put a better face on it by telling parent-investors that this was precisely why they should plunk \$6,700 into MET.

CONSIDER WHERE Blanchard comes from: middle-class Ferndale. He has earned three college degrees.



Tim Richard

For 20 years he was married to a teacher. He is well read and has a high regard for authors.

Consider Bowman: Ignoring the six-figure salaries of Wall Street, he chooses to employ his financial knowledge toward the social benefit of making education more accessible. He is an extremely proud man. And they see "misled or indoctrinated" college trustees mucking it up.

THE COLLEGES have a different point of view.

Each of the 15 considers itself "different," with unique needs that warrant more than the 3 percent increase they're getting in the state's 1989 budget.

They say they're subject not to the consumer price index (CPI) but the higher education price index (HEPI), a different and more inflationary market basket that includes more for health care, computers and the like.

At the University of Michigan, president-designate James Duderstadt, with a perfectly straight face, contends U-M is a "coordinate"

branch of government — he's on a par with the governor, and the Board of Regents on a par with the state Legislature. I heard him. Twice. Honest.

Bowman's reaction has to be off the record. We don't print on asbestos.

HISTORICALLY, Michigan has tried to give its universities and local units a high degree of autonomy.

That must end. Colleges must control tuitions, or pre-paid tuition can't succeed. The governor has four tools at his disposal.

First, he has a "bully pulpit," to use Teddy Roosevelt's term.

Second, he has budget powers — the ability to punish universities that hike tuitions faster than MET can earn compound interest.

Third, he can use his power of trustee appointment to send a message to Oakland, Central, Eastern and the other state universities.

Fourth, he can use his political influence at Democratic state conventions to deny renomination to trustees of the Big Three — U-M, Michigan State and Wayne State universities — who vote for double-digit tuition increases.

Incidentally, of six Big Three board members up for re-election this year, only U-M regent Nella Varner, a Democrat, voted for a double-digit tuition hike. The Democratic State Convention is Aug. 27-28.

Stay tuned to see how serious Blanchard-Bowman are about "deprogramming" university trustees.

Drive-ins — an era gone by Boss gives Thompson boost

IT WAS sheer luck — and lots of warm weather — that encouraged a trip to the drive-in movies this summer.

We didn't pick one of several northern Oakland County theaters, such as the Waterford, Miracle Mile in Bloomfield Township or the Commerce just around the corner. Instead, we went to the now-defunct Grand River Drive-In at the corner of Grand River and M-102 in Farmington Hills.

Like many people, we hadn't been to a drive-in theater in years, and found it wasn't much less expensive than going to an indoor theater. There were obvious regulars, from groups of noisy adolescents who needed a weekly meeting place, to family movie-goers who were having "tailgate" parties with barbecues and the works.

There's something about a drive-in theater that's more comfortable. It lets you slouch in your seat a little, eat what you please, talk without disturbing anyone else, and simply be yourself. Just about all ages and types of people like the movies, too.

WE DIDN'T know it then, and never would have guessed that this summer would be our last trip to the Grand River Drive-In. All three screens drew a good crowd, which,



Casey Hans

'I have no quarrel with building new shopping centers. But with the demolition of the Grand River Drive-In, an era has truly passed in the Farmington area.'

you can bet, came from throughout the Detroit area. It was one of the few drive-ins left.

The big screens of the Grand River were torn down two weeks ago to make way for a shopping mall that will, most likely, bring larger profits and even better traffic. Owner Tom Goldberg said his father began operating the Farmington-area drive-in in 1947, when drive-ins peaked in popularity. The retail developer for

the 33 acres in Farmington Hills also demolished the Gratiot in Roseville and the Bel Air in Detroit for similar ventures in recent years.

I have no quarrel with building new shopping centers. But with the demolition of the Grand River Drive-In, an era has truly passed in the Farmington area.

FOR SOME, it leaves memories of adolescent dates or carloads of friends who could always head for the drive-in when they needed "somewhere to go." It harkens back to the days of drive-in restaurants — which are also disappearing.

For neighbors, perhaps the weekly caravan of cars trooping in and out of the bumpy, narrow drive after dark was a nuisance. But for others, that may have been a regular, comfortable sound.

That will now be replaced with a more steady, daily traffic flow, as the flavor of the neighborhood changes.

Apparently, the peak era of the drive-ins is long gone. But I wonder about the people who regularly spent their Saturdays enjoying the outdoor movies.

It's time the teens found a new hangout, and, I guess, the Grand River Drive-In "tailgaters" will just have to look for a football game.

BACK HOME, when someone administered a really good whomp, we said he kicked butt and took names.

After the Republican primary last week, Richard Thompson had himself a long list of names.

Thompson, in all likelihood, will be the county's next prosecuting attorney. In itself, that might not be too surprising. After all, he was billed as L. Brooks Patterson's right-hand man for the 16 years that Patterson was Oakland County's most recognized and most popular politician.

BUT THE SIZE of Thompson's victory had to surprise some. Including pundits such as I who believed the winner of the four-man primary might take only 40 percent of the vote.

Thompson took 53 percent of the vote, giving him a respectable margin over the combined votes of his three opponents.

Only Mike Tyson wins more decisively. Thompson won in almost every community. He defended his own turf with ease and made shambles of his opponents in their own back yards.

Jack McDonald, a well-liked, well-respected county commissioner, was walloped in his hometown of Farm-



Rich Perlberg

ington Hills, a community he has carried easily in the past. Jeffrey Leib, a former West Bloomfield township trustee, spent a lot of bucks to gain visibility but he, too, lost to Thompson in his own home township.

McDonald, with 23 percent of the vote, and Leib, with 18 percent, at least made a blip on the tote board tallying the election returns. State Sen. Richard Fessler, whose messy divorce and whose arrest for drunk driving were not the greatest sort of springboard for a campaign, drew fewer than 4,000 votes. Candidates for trustee in West Bloomfield received nearly that many votes.

THOMPSON BY DESIGN carried the incumbent's mantle into the race. It worked. His opponents tried to take aim at his tenure in the prosecutor's office without criticizing Patterson. That was tough since Thompson painted himself as Patterson's clone and Patterson did

nothing to discourage it.

How important is Patterson's endorsement? One reporter covering the race put it this way: Patterson is so important that his secretary's endorsement becomes news.

Thompson still needs to defeat Democrat Barry Kraemer to win a four-year term, but that seems assured. In the best of times, Kraemer would be an underdog, and he wasn't even the Democrats' first choice. The party was hoping that West Bloomfield attorney Michael Schwartz (active in a recall group that included Leib among its targets) would seek the nomination but he declined.

The pressing question then is not so much if Thompson will win in November as much as if he will be a continuation of the Patterson legacy. He no doubt will take the same hard line. He has already usurped Patterson's penchant for using petition drives to garner press coverage.

But no one, least of all Thompson, thinks he will match the personality and quick wit of Patterson. Few people could. Besides, Patterson's style is not a prerequisite to being a good prosecutor.

THE QUESTION still to be addressed is whether there is any truth to the campaign rhetoric pressed most by Leib.

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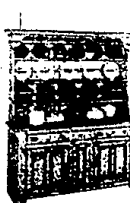


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