

points of view

Cast jaundiced eye at vague legalisms

TO LEARN what some Michigan legislators have in mind for public schools, you have to know about Kentucky.

Michigan's Constitution requires a "free" system of education, but our Senate Education and House Education committees have reported out different versions of the same idea — "equal opportunity" for education.

To hear outstate Senate Republicans and some House Democrats with poor school districts in their backyards tell it, this will help Michigan avoid Kentucky's fate. It will give our legislators an incentive to fix up inequitable school funding before the state is bashed with a lawsuit saying our school system stinks because some districts have \$2,500 per child while others have \$8,000.

To hear the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce tell it, such language invites a lawsuit. It would give poor districts a legal tool to ask the court to raid the treasury on their behalf.

I'm with the Chamber of Commerce.

ONE YEAR ago this month, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled the state's entire public school system unconstitutional. The suit was brought by the Council for Better Education, Inc., a propaganda name for 66 school districts, seven county boards of education and 22 students.

Kentuckians realized they had a problem — high dropout rates, low college attendance, high unemployment, and so on.

The high court decreed free education, available to all, "adequate" to cover basic skills. So far, so good.

It also decreed uniform education



Tim Richard

opportunities — substantially equal education.

WHOA! If Michigan wants to raise the poor districts up from \$2,500 a student to (say) \$3,200, fine. But if some of our suburban communities recruit industry, hold down city services and choose to indulge our schools, shouldn't we have that right?

Kentucky's new system will guarantee \$2,385 per student and \$2,420

in fall of 1991. But according to a pamphlet called A Guide to the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990: "The local school board may increase its funds up to an additional 30 percent, subject to the vote of the people."

In other words, while raising the floor for the poor, Kentucky lowers the ceiling for the rest. A lot of us suburbanites say "nuts."

Such rigid, legalistic equality would be a catastrophe in Michigan.

WE HAVE two or three separate economies in this state. In metro Detroit, we pay an average of 22 percent more for many items than do outstate folks — 55 percent more for home insurance, 34 percent more for auto repairs, 32 percent more for auto insurance, and so on.

We also pay 22 percent more for

education. We can't ask our teachers and principals to accept equality with Engadine and Mancelona.

But that's what happens when lawyers — frequently economic ignoramuses — linker with the system at the court level.

KENTUCKIANS ARE paying a dreadful tax price for their reforms. The total bill comes to \$1.3 billion, which, adjusted for population, would be the equivalent of \$3 billion in Michigan.

In other words, a similar outcome in Michigan would double state school spending without reducing other state expenses and while knocking down the higher-spending suburban districts.

Kentucky legislators levied a cent more on the sales tax, broadened its income base definition and raised business taxes.

Kentuckians are paying a 30-mill school property tax, which is a shade below Michigan's 33 mill average. But it taxes cars as well as homes. And it levies the tax on 100 percent of market value, not Michigan's 50 percent.

The voices in the wilderness who warned about Kentucky's competitive position in a world economy were shouted down.

The Chamber has the right attitude in casting a jaundiced eye at attempts to install vague legalisms like "equal opportunity" into the Michigan Constitution.

Tim Richard directs the Suburban Communications News Service. SCC is the parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Phys ed majors face rough going

Q: I read where Bo Schembechler, former University of Michigan football coach, gave a special graduation speech to the 75 physical education majors who were graduated from U-M last month. My son wants to be a physical education teacher and a coach. I am concerned about his opportunity for getting a job four years from now. Are my concerns legitimate?

A: Unfortunately yes.

A simple calculation tells me about 450-500 phys ed majors are graduating this year. My estimate does not take into consideration the juniors who will be seniors next fall, and the sophomores and freshmen presently in the physical education programs.

Potentially, there could be close to 500 of the present phys ed majors now in colleges graduated and looking for a teaching job by your son's senior year in college. We don't have enough gymnasiums in the state to accommodate those numbers.

It is not my purpose to bring doom and gloom to those who wish to coach and teach physical education. But somehow, young adults need to know the fact before committing to a four-year physical education degree only to find very few physical education jobs available when they graduate.

One fact is that today's couples



Doc Doyle

are having fewer children. Fewer children mean few teachers are needed.

Also where students are required to take English, math, science and social studies for three or four years, phys ed may be required for only one year. Therefore a school district needs fewer phys ed teachers for their middle schools and high schools.

And, unfortunately, if cutbacks in staff occur, elementary art, music and phys ed have traditionally been the first areas cut.

And with the proliferation of athletic events, which now include women's sports, many schools are hiring part-time coaches who have other jobs.

Many of these part-time coaches played the sport but are not necessarily phys ed majors. Many have degrees in other areas and they are cost-effective. Districts pay for their coaching time but no fringe benefits.

Part-time coaches are not neces-

sarily the best route for an athletic sports program but athletic directors have no choice when there are now twice as many events that need coaches.

I taught chemistry, a couple phys ed classes and coached varsity basketball early on in my career. I learned then and still believe in the value of a sound body as part of a sound mind.

Health and physical education programs in school districts too often have been after-thoughts and do not receive the recognition they deserve. Our present cultural trend, however, is beginning to appreciate the value of a sound body. Just look at the health spa phenomenon that has over-taken the country.

What I suggest is that your son get a double major, one in physical education and one in a subject such as general science or language arts, biology, social studies etc. He then would have two major areas to offer a school district and indeed a better opportunity for a teaching position.

It will take some extra time, possibly summer work or an extra semester. But if physical education and coaching are his goals, he has to break into the system and a phys ed major by itself makes it very difficult — at least in this part of the country.

Recycling mania a bit misguided

THE RECENT round of recycling mania is well-intentioned, but misguided.

That's because the emphasis on saving the environment has been placed on us common folk. Many, without question, accept recycling as our burden.

But while all this talk continues on how homeowners must recycle, a question comes to mind:

Who is pushing big companies to change their packaging? Shouldn't our legislators be pushing McDonald's and others who turn out excess packaging to clean up their act?

And if they did, wouldn't that really make the difference that's needed to reduce trash going into garbage dumps?

THIS THOUGHT occurred recently, while spotting the rectangular paper that lined my McDonald's tray.

The tray liner showed a beautiful photo of the earth, and information on how McDonald's was doing its part to save the world.

There's probably lots of folks, who upon reading the same message, leave the golden arches with a warm feeling about the place.

But McDonald's puts their burgers in some sort of foam box, which so far nobody has figured out how to recycle.



Kevin Brown

The topper has to be the little recycle logo printed on McDonald's hash brown containers, giving the impression the paper container is made from recycled paper.

WRONG. A printed message near that logo explains that the container is printed on recyclable paper.

Targeting the packaging practices of corporate America would seem to

be a more far-reaching way to reduce trash produced here.

But the onus is being placed on the consumers.

But what about those of us — and there's got to be plenty — who won't take the time to do all this?

You can't make everyone recycle, or expect them to. That's not being negative, it's just recognizing cold, hard reality.

If consumers would get a little more angered with big corporations that over-package their goods, if we'd scream at lawmakers to get on the backs of these corporations, then we would really be doing our part to save the earth.

Kevin Brown is a staff writer for the Plymouth Observer.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

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