

POINTS OF VIEW

Here's the scoop on state spending priorities

The squeaky wheel gets the grease — and the news coverage. So let's see how much we really know about what has happened to Michigan's economy and state spending over the last decade.

1. True or false: Two-thirds of Michigan's population increase during the 1980s went to prison.
2. State spending on prisons grew nearly 300 percent in the last nine years. Would you be right or wrong in concluding prisons are the biggest part of the state budget?
3. True or false: We'd be better off if the state spent as much on public health programs as it does locking up people in prisons.
4. Let's see if you can rank these categories in Michigan's \$20 billion spending plan:
Health programs
Higher education
K-12 school aid
Social services

5. Gov. John Engler generated a lot of controversy for eliminating most of the General Assistance welfare program and cutting aid to the arts, and we've heard schools moan about the "Robin Hood" state aid bill. But let's see if you can rank the departments that took the biggest percentage cuts from fiscal 1991 to '92 in the general fund: Agriculture
Commerce
Education
Labor
Management and Budget
6. Looking at the period 1981-91, would you say the following statement is true, false or blatantly false: "The best cure for welfare dependency is a job."
7. Public schools in Michigan got \$2 billion from the school aid fund. If the State Lottery were abolished, how much would the school aid fund lose?
A. 90 percent
B. 50 percent



TIM RICHARD

- C. 20 percent.
8. Which department of state government disappeared in 1991? Civil Rights
Licensing and Regulation
Military Affairs
9. Michigan's total population was 9.3 million in the 1990 census, virtually stagnant from 1980. Meanwhile, enrollment in 15 state universities:
A. Fell 8 percent.
B. Remained flat.

C. Rose 8 percent.

The answers are gleaned from "1991-92 Fiscal Digest," prepared by the staff of the Senate Fiscal Agency.

1. True. Michigan's population rose a trivial 33,000 to 9.3 million. The number in Department of Corrections facilities rose more than 22,000 to top 37,000. Thus, two-thirds of our population increase went to prison.
2. Wrong. Although spending on prisons grew 292 percent from \$231 million to \$905 million, prisons rank only as Michigan's fifth highest priority.
3. False. Of last year's general fund budget, 13.8 percent went to health programs, 11.5 percent to corrections.
4. Social services, nearly 30 percent; K-12 school aid, 14 percent; health, 8.8 percent; and higher education, 6.5 percent.
5. Percentagewise, the biggest losers were Commerce, 42.4; Labor, 30.8; Education, 30.4; Agriculture, 16.4. In short, the Lansing bureaucracy was cut to preserve public services.
6. Blatantly false. From 1981-91, total employment in Michigan rose 687,000 to nearly 3.9 million, but the AFDC welfare caseload rose from 191,000 to 205,000 — welfare cases went up even as employment rose. The welfare caseload has a life of its own regardless of what's going on in the general economy.
7. C. 20 percent. The Lottery contributes \$466 million to a \$2.3 billion fund.
8. Licensing and Regulation. With 600 employees, it was absorbed mostly by the Department of Commerce.
9. C. Higher education's full-time equivalent student enrollment rose 8 percent to 216,000. Actual head count rose 12 percent to 263,000.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional news.

Reports show seniors can still start college studies

Question: I am a 52-year-old high school graduate who has not been in a classroom in 34 years. I want to go to college this month but don't I can keep up with all the young students. My memory is not as good as it once was, and I don't know if I will be able to retain information for tests. I am afraid I will be embarrassed in a class of younger students. Should I give it a try?

Answer: Get a college catalogue today, see a college counselor now, buy a back-pack for books and get going. Too many gracefully aging adults question their ability to keep pace with the young.

Look at the research! One study, a six-year longitudinal study by Dr. (s) Warner Schaale and Sherry Willis of Pennsylvania State University found it is not age that determines one's mental ability but the amount of mental stimulation a person receives. These researchers were not looking at 30 and 40 year old people. They tapped into these people who have experienced rain and sunshine for 64 to 95 years.

They found that any mental functioning that had declined in an aged person could be reversed once that senior citizen was stimulated by new, enriching learning experiences. The researchers had only a couple of 90-plus year olds, but plenty of 60-, 70- and 80-year old students.

Frankly, as a former part-time community college and university instructor, I found my mature 50 and older students didn't have as many hangups as some of their younger classmates who were seeking their niche in life. Most of my seniors had experienced a full measure of life and death, and once in the classroom were not, from my perspective, intimidated by a college



DOC DOYLE

instructor. Indeed, I often learned as much from them as they learned from me.

You have made an inference that all seniors over 50 are out of the college mainstream. Look at the facts! The City University of New York has more than 6,000 students over age 65. The once experimental Harvard Institute of Learning in Retirement (now 14 years

old) has 440 students between the ages of 50 and 90.

Going back to school may have little to do with getting a degree for many mature adults. Often retired people go back because they have more free time and want some mental stimulation over and above their last golf score.

Contact your local community college or a college/university that has programs which reaches out for the non-traditional student. You are fortunate because both community colleges and universities in this area now have decentralized satellite campuses all over the area that are very convenient for students of all ages. Meet with a college counselor to determine your high interest area.

Senior citizens should ask themselves some basic questions such as: "Do I wish to audit the class for no grade?" "Do I wish to seek a college

degree?"

You want a liberal arts degree, it seems, just to get a degree and to be a college graduate. Go for it. If you start now, in a couple of years you will say: "I can't believe I'm this far along toward my degree. If you don't start now, in three years you will say: 'I wish I would have gone back.'"

Do it now and forget about your age, young man.

I've got you by a few years and I'm going back to take anthropology and comparative religions (the closer I get to my maker, the more interest I seem to have in these areas.) See ya' on campus.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

LETTERS

Story not all happy

I am writing in regard to Casey Huns' story in the July 30 paper regarding the adoptee's reunion with her birth mother. The title says their search had a "storybook" ending — a happy one.

As the mother of an adopted son I adore with all my heart, I wonder if the adoptive parents were so joyful. The beginning part of the story states that her adoptive family cared for and loved

her. They must have wanted children very badly or they would not have adopted this infant.

I can only imagine their anguish now that their child is living with her birth mother.

Certainly it should be the right of every child to meet her birth parents. However, let's not forget the family who loved and raised her for twenty years. They may have now lost their child.

Dianna Chichester, Birmingham

Father out of control

The encounter I had with you and your family today will not leave my mind. It has bothered me all afternoon.

My family was enjoying a beautiful, sunny, Saturday afternoon strolling through town . . . The idyllic mood was shattered when your four- or five-year-old son ran out of a restaurant screaming.

You and your wife followed him out.

Your wife was timidly trying to calm you down but you were yelling at your son to "be quiet or I'll spank you again."

Your son screamed, held his bottom and ran toward my family saying "help me" with tears streaming down his face. My husband picked up my two-year-old son who had witnessed this incident and was now crying himself. I started toward your son but my sister stopped me.

She explained that she has read that

the best thing to do in this situation is to give the child a reassuring smile.

Your son did not learn any kind of lesson today. He only learned about anger, humiliation and fear.

Probably, more than anyone, you regret your behavior today. Have you apologized to your wife and son? I am sure your little boy would forgive you if you did and he would learn a lesson out of this horrible day after all. Sometimes moms and dads misbehave.

Kathleen H. Trott, Bloomfield Hills



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