

POINTS OF VIEW

Business approach won't work with schools

Peddlers of the "privatization" snake oil probably didn't notice the television industry's ratings of weekly sitcoms.

That's because the "privatization" crowd is selling ideology and can't be bothered with facts. In the insulated world of Mackinac Center and its right-wing money tree, government is always dumb and inefficient; private business is always smart and efficient.

Reality suggests that government and business have their shares of heroes and villains, but they are different kinds of operations. But I'm getting ahead of the story, which starts with commercial TV.

Among white households watching prime-time TV, "Seinfeld" is the No. 2 program, but it's 79th among blacks. "Single Guy" ranks fifth among whites and 109th among blacks. And so on.

Among blacks, "New York Undercover" is first, but it's 106th with

whites; "Living Single" is second among blacks and 107th among whites. And so on.

Some critics say there should be more shows with racial diversity; like the Clinton Cabinet, TV sitcoms should reflect the face of America. I offer no opinion. Let's just try to understand how commercial TV works.

Advertisers (mostly private businesses) seek a narrowly defined, demographically desirable group of viewers. If you're selling products white folks want, you buy commercials on shows white folks watch; ditto with black folks.

That's business. Demographics. Market niches.

Government works differently. It deals in services for all strata of society in all corners of the region.

Congress in the 1990s made a decision about mail. It would be a govern-



TIM RICHARD

ment enterprise that would charge the same amount for delivering a letter a block away as it does to deliver it 1,000 miles. The idea was to bind together many states into a nation.

It was a political judgment, not an economic one.

Public schools operate the same way.

When Michigan led the way into a free education as a constitutionally-guaranteed right in the 1830s, the state tried to give every kid something resembling equal opportunity.

That meant integrating all strata of society and all religions. It meant standardizing the curriculum so that in a mobile society an eighth-grader in Farmington or Novi would be studying the same things as an eighth-grader in Kentwood or Engadine.

Most Michiganans like the idea. They tell pollsters they like and trust the neighborhood school, warts and all. If specialized programs are needed, provide them close to home — for everyone.

The opposite notion is sold by the privatizers. Oh, we gotta have "competition." Oh, good schools should be allowed to drive out bad. Oh, let's give private, sectarian and ethnic schools

charters and call them "public academies" so they can compete.

It is no more necessary to have competition in education than between police departments or building inspectors. Can you imagine what quality housing we would have if builders were free to choose between building inspectors instead of being required to deal with the local city or township's inspector?

Government is government and serves everyone. Business is business and serves market niches. Government can't do a good job of providing food and household services. Business can't serve everyone with mail and education.

Enough of this "privatization" and "competition" snake oil!

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

Water wonderland is fine — no matter what the temp

West Bloomfield, Walled Lake and their environs aren't the only ones with plenty of lakeshore. It's one of the things that makes a drive, even on icy roads, something to be treasured.

Obviously Lake Orion, Oxford and Clarkston have those shorelines, too. Troy's Emerald Shores, ponds in Rochester and Farmington Hills, Carpenter Lake in Southfield are known, but say, what? Bloomfield Hills' Whay Lake and others in Bloomfield Township? You bet.

When the sign on Maple Road says Wing Lake, it means more than a road. Sometimes house buyers think about more than the local school when choosing a place to live. It's more a lifestyle they're looking for, and if that includes water, then Oakland County is not properly indeed, even in the depth of winter.

This year I've seen ice skating, and one residential hockey rink marked out with a good shovel and those orange road commission cones. Some people also sail across the ice on a windy day,

but wait for different conditions for ice fishing.

And we're all probably familiar with summer's fun and the glory of a tree-lined shore drive in the fall.

Actually I've known about the secrets held by some of our communities for some time, having read stories about how people feed too much of the wrong kind of thing to ducks in the area. However, in a recent Birmingham Eclectic was a story about divers from the Bloomfield Hills public safety department, who were practicing their skills on and under the ice of Whay Lake.

Practice is important for rescuing both two- and four-footed species who think they can tackle the best, even though they sometimes end up in the worst of situations. The public safety officers reported having to rescue animals this year, but no one sizeable had gone through, thank heavens.

And to keep those situations from becoming even worse, the officers must make sure they can handle the elements and the rescue.



SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

There are others who skillfully perform rescues, patrol the lakes and practice what they know. They are Oakland County Sheriff's Deputies.

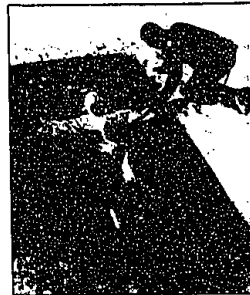
All these folks are a breed apart. Perhaps dealing with an unusual part of nature is part of it. I can distinctly remember becoming numb upon learning that my son, an experienced diver, also performed ice diving. "It's so peaceful and quiet," he said. There is a time you have to trust — and let go.

But back to the heroes. They call

them public safety officers or firefighters, but they really deal with all the elements — fire, wind, water (frozen and liquid) and, I suppose, dirt if necessary. Added to all these are chemical spills, natural and man-made disasters. It's a whole lot of punishment for very little glory.

Right now various fire and police agencies are giving us a little bit more, trying to teach us how to watch out for unsafe ice and how to perform a rescue if an accident does occur (start by always going out with a buddy). The recent warmer temperatures are a good warning signs of danger below. Those in the lakes areas know the meaning of the phrases first ice and last ice — neither are to be trusted.

But there is a certain beauty to be appreciated in our suburbs, and by following the good advice about respecting the many moods of Mom Nature, we'll all be able to step back and enjoy the scenery just a bit longer.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Rescuers: Public safety personnel have been practicing their cold water and ice diving rescue skills throughout Oakland County.

Populist Pat powers up government for workers

It's beginning to look as though the March 19 Michigan presidential primary could be decisive in the suddenly wide-open race for the Republican nomination.

Originally designed to be little more than a sideshow in the stately process to the nomination of Sen. Robert Dole, the race in Michigan has been thrown into a turmoil by the unexpectedly strong showings of Patrick Buchanan, Lamar Alexander and Steve Forbes.

A poll taken before Buchanan's upset victory in New Hampshire indicated that likely voters in the Michigan GOP primary preferred Dole by only two to one (43 percent versus 19 percent) over Buchanan. The poll also showed that 45 percent of people from union households planned to vote in the Republican primary.

And that could spell trouble for Dole. Part of Buchanan's powerful appeal — so powerful because so intensely emotional — is a message aimed straight at working Michiganians who are scared of losing their jobs, worried about the post-NAFTA giant sucking sound of jobs leaving our country, and baffled about how to make ends meet.

Buchanan isn't dumb. He knows that the median wage of American workers has fallen by around 13 percent since 1973. He realizes that the gap between the rich and the middle class is now the greatest in modern history. He sees giant corporations laying off thousands of workers while salaries of top executives keep climbing, and he figures there are more voting family and friends of the former than the latter.

Buchanan's policy prescriptions are simple. Slap a tariff on goods imported from countries with whom we have a trade deficit. Slap a bigger tariff on goods from countries like China who treat their people badly. Rescind NAFTA. Withdraw from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Stop playing footsie with countries where workers are paid pennies an hour. Stop coddling big shot corporate executives who earn hundreds of times what their average workers do.

In other words, populist Pat would use the power of government to insulate American workers from foreign competition. No wonder traditional conservatives (read: pro free market, against government, taxes and deficit) are apoplectic at his candidacy.

Interestingly, there is just now a wonderful deal waiting to be made between Senate majority leader Dole and President Clinton, thanks to work done over the past few years by a couple of Michigan folks. The idea is to consolidate the confusing morass of job training programs into



PHILIP POWER

vouchers that could be used by workers when their jobs are threatened. Talk about using the power of government to address directly the concerns of worried workers!

Doug Ross, who was the super-active director of the state Commerce Department in the Blanchard administration, went to Washington in 1992 with Bill Clinton as assistant secretary of Labor for training and employment. Based on the Michigan experiment with the Opportunity Card, his aim was to create what amounts to the G1 Bill applied to workers in need of skills and training.

Ross was joined by another Michiganian, Paul Dimond, who is the resident worker training expert in the White House policy shop. Over the years, they persuaded Labor Secretary Robert Reich and the president to back the Careers Act, a bill recently passed by the House of Representatives with bipartisan support.

But once in the Senate, the Careers Act ran into trouble. Republican governors, including Michigan's John Engler, preferred pouring all job training money into bloc grants to the states. Withstanding criticism that their approach merely substitutes inefficient state bureaucrats for inefficient federal ones, they have managed to hold up the bill in a House-Senate conference committee.

Wouldn't it be fun to see Sen. Dole, the masterful legislative mechanic, move the Careers Act to passage, to be signed by President Clinton, the governmental activist?

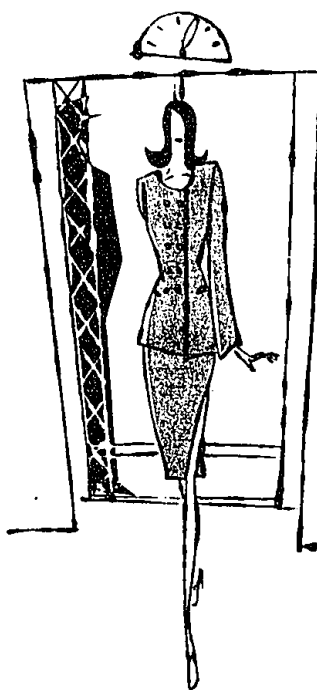
Dole could argue powerfully against Buchanan that the best way to succeed in international competition is for government to empower American workers instead of putting up walls around them. And Clinton could achieve a policy initiative long-sought by his Michigan advisers.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail phone number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

nm presents giorgio armani

Join us March 4 for our spring trunk show in the Couture Salon.

Neiman Marcus



THE SOMERSET COLLECTION 2705 W. BIG BEAVER ROAD 810 643-3300