### POINTS OF VIEW

# Columnist misses mark when it comes to 'Bell Curve'

piece in the Observer, within which he asserted that "... poverty isn't a factor in low test scores." He was referring to tests, such as the MEAP, which is taken by many schoolchildren in Michigan annually, and IQ tests generally. Richard made his assertion, based upon his reading of the "Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life." He should have given the book a closer read.

He further claims that "... the political left is systematically attacking all measures of ability from MEAP to IQ." If Democrats are identified as the left and Republicans the right, the

left and resputations the right, the claim does not stand up to the light of examination. The Bell Curve" claims scientific evidence of genetically-based differ-ence in intelligence among social closses and races that determine income, employment, welfare depen deacy, divorce and quality of parental behavior.

Simply put: Success or failure in the American economy and all that surrounds it is largely a matter of the genes that people inherit. Herrnstein and Murray, the writers of "Curve," go on to hypothesize the stratification of America according to cognitive abil-

ity.
Unlike Richard, who makes genetic dowment an absolute in determ

Unike Richard, who makes genetic endowment an absolute in determining the result of test acores and other social consequences, the writers of "Curve" leave room for environmental shading. On page 105, they assert that "... the genetic component of IQ is unlikely to be smaller than 40 percent or higher than 80 percent."

On the same page, they say that "... we will adopt a middling estimate of 60 percent heritability, which by extension means that IQ is about 40 percent a matter of environment."

Others, namely behavioral psychologists, believe that human potential is almost totally shaped by the environment. But, minimally, Herrastein and Murray have admitted the inexact

**GUEST COLUMNIST** 



nature of their thesis. That is a long way from the absolute of Tim Richard.

There is an understanding, on the part of this writer, that there is a transmission of genetic material from parents to child. There is also a belief, documented by others, that income and other components of an index of socioeconomic status serve as rough

ment to which a child is exposed. How well a child does on the MEAP and IQ tests is, to some degree, determined

tests is, to some degree, determined by that learning environment.

A child of a well-to-de professional in Bloomfield Hills, which does extremely well on the MEAP, is more likely to be introduced by book learning earlier and more intensively than the child of a laborer in Alpena, which does poorly on the MEAP. Early practice at reading and calculating does, very directly, affect one's IQ or MEAP score.

Higher socioeconomic standing allows parents to buy quality day care, preschool and K-12 schooling. It permits the purchase of instructional toys, encyclopedias and computers. Furthermore, the MEAP and IQ

tests do not measure innate ability as is the assumption in "The Bell Curve." They are measures of learned intelligence that are enhance blunted by the learning environment of the child. One estimate, by psychologist Stephan Ceci of Cornell, states that there are as high as six IQ points lost per year of missed schooling. It is clear that the more schooling you acquire, the smarter you will appear on tests. Again, the tests are not a measure of innate ability. Rather, they are a manifestation of learned

intelligence.
As for the left attacking the MEAP and similar tests, the balance of power on the State Board of Education was with the Democrats when the MEAP was conceived by that body Mea years in the Democrats. body. More recently, the Democrats are recommending the national test-ing of students. Guess who stands in opposition to them? That's correct, the Republicans, who are on the political

Tim Richard has written a number of articles that have been interesting, informative, thought-provoking and cational. But on this one he's full

Al Churchil! is a Livonia resident.

## Drop in out-of-wedlock births not a matter of teaching 'safe sex

efore Dick Headlee retired to
Utah a few years ago, I bumped
into him in a Farmington store,
and we got to talking politics.
I commented on Michigan's and the

nation's soaring out-of-wedlock birth rates and the resultant drain on welfare, Long-term welfare dependency, after all, wasn't "child poverty," as the social workers claimed, but a phenom-enon of never-married mothers.

The former CEO of Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. and 1982 Republican gubernatorial nominee Republican gubernatorial nominee didn't blame welfare on out-of-wedlock births. Instead, he blamed out-of-wellock births on welfare.

"If you want less of something, you

tax it. If you want more of something, you subsidize it," said Headlee. Simple but not simplistic. He is

mut to be right. Michigan has taken two dramatic

eproduction. First, in 1988, voters decided that First, in 1988, voters decided that state Medicaid no longer should pay for abortions. Second, Gov. John Engler and the Legislature initiated a series of programs to require welfare recipients to do something resembling

work to qualify for welfare.
The results are coming in.
"Teen births plunge," said the
headline on one story last week. "Teen

heading of one story late week. Tech births' is the jargon social workers use because it goes against their polit-ical grain to say "out-0-wedlock." Michigan's 'teen birthrate' declined from 59 per 1,000 in 1991 to 49 per 1,000 in 1995, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The decline held for both blacks and whites. It used to be fashional



births, but no longer. Sometime in 1985-86, white girls in the U.S. began producing more out-of-wedlock babies than black girls.

Around the bottom of the recession in 1983, Michigan had 240,000 welfare cases. In part it was due to people running out of unemployment benefits; in part, it was due to out-of-wedlock births. I chatted with Sen. Bob Geake of Northville about the caseload. Geake handled the social services budget in the Senate and is as knowledgeable as they come. He figured there was a rock bottom caseload of 205,000. That was in the 1980s. Well, the "welfare reform" of the

1990s, embraced by most Democrats and all Ropublicans, has knocked the bottom out of that figure. The Engler administration now says the caseload is in the 150,000 ballpark.

The effect of eliminating welfare

bortions has been harder to trace. In 1988, the theory among social workers was the teeter-totter: If you cut Medicaid funding for abortions, out-Gwedlock hirths would rise.

Actually, there was evidence to the contrary from Ohio and Georgia. When they cut abortion funding, abortions and births both fell. Social work-

ers had the wrong mathematical for mula. Medicaid funding didn't just encourage abortions; it also encour-aged conceptions.

Other folks have other explanations for the declining "teen birth rate."

Donna Shalala, Clinton's secretary of HHS, gives credit to lessons about safe sex and abstinence. Our concerted effort to reduce teen pregnancy is succeeding," she was quoted as say-

ing.
The Michigan Abstinence Partnership says it was the effort to encourage girls to abstain or use condoms that helped.

I think Dick Headlee was right.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His voice mail number is (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

### Term limits also have liabilities

or a majority of the state House of Repre-'sentatives - 65 out of 110 - time is up.

Term limits, approved by the voters in 1992 and affirmed by the court this year, prohibit them from running again in August and

hibit them from running again in August and Ndvember.

It's easy and, sometimes, useful to poke fun at our legislators. But the fact is they work hard—probably harder than most of us—and they do care about their communities.

Tim Richard, the head of the HomeTown News Service that brings stories from Lansing to this newspaper, interviewed retiring legislators. What they said was thoughtful and, often insightful. Here's a sampling that readers metht want to clip out for comparison when car

tors, what they said was thoughtful and, often, insightful. Here's a sampling that readers might want to clip out for comparison when candidates for the House come calling this fall:
LYN BANKES, R-Livonia, who served 14 years in the House and is running for the Wayna County Commission, spoke to her biggest disappointment: "Not getting the appliance repair bill passed. It's a very simple consumer protection bill. But one lobbying group, the Small Business Association, doesn't like it high has prevented its getting through. It parallels the auto repair act—they have to give you a written estimate, and if they change the estimate they have to let you know."

"BARBARA DOBB, R-Union Lake, who heads her own CPA firm in West Bloomfield and is tilinking of running for the Senate, reflected on the consequences of term limits: "The whole political landscape is going to change under

the consequences of term limits: "The whole political landscape is going to change under the limits. This will be our first election under term limits. This will be our first election under term limits. The public will get a real wake-up call as to how far-reaching it is. You're going to see changes in the type of legislation that comes out of the House and what types of coalitions are built."

PENNY CRISSMAN, R-Rochester, who leaves the Legislature with mixed feelings. "I will not miss the travel time, an hour and a half one way. But there is life outside the Legislature, and I'm looking forward to it." She says the biggest frustration was, "When I came in, you were expected to sit and listen (until gaining seniority. But term limits came in. We had to convince them (the leadership) they no longer had the luxury of time in learning. We needed to be brought on board."

'ALLAN L. CROPSEY, R-DeWitt, best known for pushing gun ownership bills and representing fundamentalist Christians, advises his successor: "Phy need to have a well-rounded education, well-rounded life experience. Listen to the constituents and hear what they're really saying; hear the fear that's motivating their PENNY CRISSMAN, R-Rochester, who

saying; hear the fear that's motivating their stand on an issue. A lot of times you can come

accommodations."
FRANK FITZGERALD, R-Grand Ledge, who



nning for the Republican nomination for attorney general after six terms in the House, reflected on a reading list for a good legislator: "There's not a single document or a book. One "There's not a single document or a book. One can do this job without being a political science major or a lawyer. Two documents a legislator should have the greatest familiarity with are tho U. S. Constitution and the State Constitution. Beyond that, some general grounding in government, common sense and a knowledge of your people. Reading the local nowspaper, honest, is the second most important."

GREG KAZA, R-Rochester Hills, the House's libertarian policy wonk, advised his successor: "Knock on a lot of doors – that's the most important factor. Make sure you don't hold grudges and go to as many events put on by members not only of your party but of the opposing

TOM MIDDLETON, R-Ortonville, who is challenging incumbent Sen. Mat Dunaskiss in the GOP primary, advised his successor: "Meet the people. There are 110 of us in the House.

the people. There are 110 of us in the House. You can't be an expert on everything."
KIRK PROFIT, D-Ypsilanti, advised 21-yearolds considering a career in the Legislature:
"Live life to the fullest every day. Understand
people and what they want. We don't come here
with the answers. We come as conduits, advocates and facilitators."

DEBORAH WHYMAN, R-Canton, is running
out to Senate seat being vecated by Rob Genke

for the Senate seat being vacated by Bob Geake. Her biggest disappointment: "Seeing adults act like kindergartners. We work on bills and all get very tired, and (some) return to the behavior

get very tired, and (some) return to the behavior they had when they were 6 years old – petty bickering, just generally childish." Reflecting on the distilled experience of these retiring legislators makes me more than a little nervous about what's to come when the Legisla-

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Com-munications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your com-ments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@oeonline.com



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