POINTS OF VIEW

Efficient or power mad?

ov. John Engler last week transferred responsibility for (a) adult and vocational education to the Department of Career Development and (b) state education assessment tests (MEAP) to the Department of Treasury, Both programs previously had been run by the Department of Education.

I thought the headline in The Macomb Daily caught it just right: "Is Engler power mad or just efficient?"

mad or just efficient?

As evidence for the efficiency school of thought, consider the shift of career and technical services and adult education to the Department of Career Development.

I chaired the Job Training Coordinating Commission during the 1980s. In those-days,

responsibility for job training and career devel-opment was inefficiently splattared all over state government. That's why I thought it was right for Engler to create the new Department of Career Development; it concentrated respon sibility and accountability for career-related programs and igh training into one administraprograms and job training into one administra unit.

moving staff overseeing adult educe tion and vocational schools, including vocation al courses at community colleges, to the Career Development department makes sense for the same reason. It strategically links adult and vocational education together with community colleges in one coherent part of state govern-

ment.

Given how important high skills are for
Michigan kids and businesses alike, I can only

As evidence supporting the power mad charge, consider what the governor has done to

the MEAP program.
MEAP stands for the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, covering reading, writing, science and math, with social science to be added soon. Eleventh graders who pass all tests can be awarded \$2,500 Merit college scholarships, beginning with the June 2000 graduating class.

Responsibility for the MEAP test has been

in the hands of the Department of Education for years. Under its leadership, the test has been one of the most powerful tools for school reform because it assesses what kids actually learn in school and provides solid evidence where individual schools need to do better

Last year, however, in creating the Merit scholarship program and linking it to MEAP test results, the legislature created a new Michigan Merit Award Board. This provided a convenient rationale for moving oversight of MEAP tests from the education folks to, of all

MEAP tests from the education looks to, of at places, the Department of Treasury. The relevant paragraph from the gover-nor's press release read: "Because the law requires that the Michigan Merit Award Boa review and approve the assessment tests before they may be used to determine eligibili-ty under the scholarship program, the responty under the scholarship program, the respon sibility for the administration of MEAP is transferred to the Department of Treasury." What's that? Transfer responsibility for the biggest tool for school reform from educa-



tors to bean counters in the treasury?

As more evidence for the "power mad" pos sibility, consider that of the seven members of sibility, consider that of the seven members of the Merit board, six are Engler appointees: Mark Murray, head of Treasury; Barbara Bolin, director of Career Development; Kath-leen Barclay, vice president of global human resources for General Motors; Clark Durant, who recently resigned from the State Board of Education after missing the majority of its meetings during his last three years; Isaiah "Ike" McKinnon, former Detroit police chief; and one person yet to be named. (The seventh board member is Art Ellis,

who gets his seat because he is Superintendent of Education.)

Excepting Ellis, who runs the Department one of the Merit Board memof Education, none of the Merit Board mem-bers has any background in K-12 administra-tion, curriculum development or education reform. Murray, who chairs the Merit board, is widely regarded as a sane and thoughtful guy, but he doesn't know much about educational

Members of the State Board of Education who are elected statewide (and, therefore, not under Engler's thumb) — blasted the

"It makes no sense at all to pull responsibility for the MEAP test away from educators and give it to people who know nothing about testing," said member Sharon Gire, a former Democratic stato representative. Dorothy Beardmore, a Republican member from Rochester, pointed out that "testing is very technical. It should be based on curriculum standards, which remain in the Department of Education. There is no logic at all in the MEAP Education. There is no logic at all in the MEAP

Forget all the hot air coming out of the governor's office about better coordination of the MEAP test with the Merit scholarship. The purpose of the MEAP test is not to determine who gets Merit scholarships; the purpose of the MEAP test is to improve education.

It's hard to see anything here other than a

pure grab for power.

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When it breaks, we'll be there

Brush.
When an exciting story breaks, it's a reminder to many of us why we got into newspa-per reporting in the first place. It's being on the scene, in the middle of the excitement, getting there first and getting the best information.

Friday was that kind of day at the Observer's

Livonia office when a breaking news story set off the reporter's alarm just as the working day

began and just half a mile away.
Fortunately, the chemical fire at McGean-Rohco did not cause serious injury. But for several hours there was an anticipation of disaster that seemed appropriately ghoulish for Hal-loween weekend.

That's the other side of the reporter's rush.

It's always the big complaint about newspaper people, that they love disasters, scandals, bad news. While no one I know would ever want a disaster to occur, it is true that reporters respond with heightened energy when one does occur. And while some readers complain, most avidly read about the disaster before moving on to other stories. And knowing about disasters helps us find ways to prevent them in the

As a reporter I have covered house fires, car accidents, drug raids and a couple low-rent mur ders. But the biggest Trush" was a story that turned from minute by minute excitement to a numbing sadness and, finally, to an impotent

I was a very young reporter for the Lorain Journal in Ohio. Lorain is a steel town on the north Erie shore. It is also the home of Ameri-can Shipbuilding. Early one morning the news editor heard there was a fire at the shippard. Jim Mahony was one of those old newsmen who slept with his police scanner and knew the name of everybody in town and all their relatives. He said "Go," and a photographer and I

We got there just after the fire department and just before the police, which meant that we got down into the yard. A fire was engulfing the new Roger Blough, a U.S. Steel freighter that was undergoing final preparations for launch. Billows of black smoke and licks of orange

flame made a dramatic sight but also were warning that this mighty freighter might blow at any minute. That didn't deter the brave firefighters who ran into the smoke in search of shipworkers. The photographer, Kurt Smith, took a heartbreaking photo of a firefighter car-rying out a limp body that won national awards and led to his selection as newspaper photogra-



HUGH GALLAGHER

pher of the year.

The time in the yard allowed me to talk to several workers who gave their theories about what might have caused the fire, theories distance the several workers. what might have caused the lire, theories dis-puted by company management. But soon the police arrived and escorted me to the gate whe reporters from the Cleveland newspap television stations had finally arrived.

television stations and inally arrived.
We set up headquarters in a bar across the
street, constantly feeding information back to
our city editors. One of the competing reporters
was Joe Esterhas, who would soon leave Cleveland for Hollywood to become a controversial
screenwriter. At this time he was just an obnox

ious big city reporter.

The story shifted time and again. Finally, it was confirmed, four workers were dead.

was confirmed, four workers were dead.
The owner of the shipbuilding company came to town for damage control. He was the already rich but not yet famous George Steinbrenner. Many of those qualities of arrogance and abruptness that have marked his reign as owne of the New York Yankees were already on display during this crisis. I was probably judging him unfairly under the circumstances, but his manner left a losting and disturbing impression

him untarity under the circumstances, out also manner left a losting and disturbing impression. Though stories like this and the McGean-Robco fire are the exception, they are an impor-tant part of what news people do. We compete to be at a place first because it allows us to get be at a place first because it allows us to get information we might have trouble getting later. We compete to get to the right people in a timely manner because it prevents attempts to put a better face on a bad situation.

But as a community newspaper, we also are very careful to understand what is going on and

ort it accurately, fairly and, we hope, com-

report it accurately, fairly and, we nope, com-passionately.

When news breaks, we'll be there.

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