Simple things would address state deficit

an possibly imagine.

According to the latest estimates by the Senate Fiscal Agoncy, and assuming spending stays at the current level, Michigan's general fund budget will be more than \$1 billion in the red for the fis-

illion in the red for the fis-cal year that begins Oct. 1, 2003, while the school nid fund will be \$200 million in deficit for the same period. And, or course, Lansing has yet to finish work getting the budget balanced for the current fiscal year. Dominated by a coali-tion of cut-the-budget-and-damn-the-conse-

error and damm-the-consequences lawmakers and damm-the-consequences lawmakers and gun shy political careerists running for higher office, the Legislature has no clue what to Engler administration, having used up the consequence of the conseq

do. The Engler administration, having used up all the little accounting tricks and pots of money, was reduced last week to proposing a 25-cent tax increase on eigarettes; this got exactly eight votes on the Senate floor.

And the candidates for governor, who will have to face a billion-dollar budget problem the moment they take office, are by and large spending a lot of effort not talking about the problem. Any category you mention, it looks bad. Really had.

Roads. Federal highway funds are down and

bad. Roads. Federal highway funds are down and the interest payments on the bonds that paid for the Build Michigan program are going to start soen. If nothing is done, state spending on fixing our admittedly bad roads will be slashed from \$2 billion to \$1\$ billion, and next winter you're going to see staged photo ops with politicians standing waist deep in pot holes.

Medicaid. There are 100,000 more people on Medicaid than there were 18 months ago, a consequence of the recession. Reimbursement rates to doctors and hospitals don't cover their costs; as a result, lots are refusing to accept Medicaid patients. There is plenty of fraud in the system, especially in southeastern Michigan, but it's hard to catch. A federal entitlement, the Medicaid program is in financial and managerial chaes, but it's never going to go away.

Medicaid money comes out of the general fund. Where are you going to find \$1 billion in a \$10 billion fund that has already been stretched out of shape? Cut appropriations for higher educa-

tion? Sure, but college tuition rates are sure to go up. Slash the Department of Corrections budget for prisons? Fine idea, but the system that warehoused 18,000 immates in 1982 has 48,000 today, and you can't just dump them out in the street. Wherever you look, the situation is dire. Those who are competing for the (increasingly dubious) honor of leading our state are staying as far away from the subject as they can.

Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus, who saw the situation develop on his watch, wants to talk about how nice the weather is. Attorney General Jennifer Granholm is talking about how much she dislikes bureaucracies, while former governor Jim Blanchard is talking about his experience (which, for the record, includes his decision to increase the state income tax when we faced a recession in his first term). David Bonior, to his credit, is saying the situation is serious.

The only candidate I can find who is prepared to deliver detailed straight talk about the budget is State Sen. Joe Schwarz, who wowed 'em a couleweak again at he Macking Laland conference.

to deriver declared straight tank mooth the sought is State Sen. Job Schwarz, who wowed 'em a couple weeks ago at the Mackinac Island conference. "With the cuts we've made this year and the cuts we're making for next year and with the early retirement for state employees, we are in the process of eviscerating state government," says Schwarz a physicion

retirement for state employees, we are in the process of eviscerating state government," says
Schwarz, a physician.
"All the pots of money and accounting gimmicks are gone, and people who think we don't
have to find some revenue to fix the problem are
either enting funny mushrooms or smoking
something illegal," Schwarz adds
Schwarz wants to delay for two years both the
scheduled .1 percent rollback in the Single Business Tax (gets \$110 million per year).
"By doing a couple of simple things that are
casy to do, we can get through the rest of this
year and next without drastic cuts and start confronting the \$1 billion deficit for 2004."
He's right. The Citizens Research Council
report validates it. People who have been studying state finances for years know it. Those legislators who are neither clueless nor running for
higher office know it. And all the candidates for
governor know it.

Too had most of 'em are completely unwilling
to face facts.

Too bad most of 'em are completely unwilling to face facts.

Phil Power is the Chairman of the Board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2206 or at ppower@homecomm.net.



Keep our grand old flag flying as symbol of freedom

Hugh Gallagher

You're the emblem of the land I love

George M. Cohan

When my sons were in high school they knew a kid. They called him Flag Boy. His car was painted Red, White and Blue and was festooned with flags. He wore flags wherever he

went.

It was hard to say whether he did this to attract
attention, as he was the classic "loner," or whether he
did it because of some deep and mysterious patriot-

did it because of some deep and mysternous parturism.

It was a gaudy display but not disrespectful. But you could look at it from completely different perspectives. You could see it as a pure expression of national pride or as a tongue-in-cheek paredy of that same patriculism. Flag Boy wouldn't say.

Sometimes it isn't easy to read what people are saying when they fly the flag.

Friday is Flag Day, a day to take special pride in displaying the Stars and Stripes. The day was first celebrated in 1885 on the 108th anniversary of the adoption of the Stars and Stripes as the flag design in 1777 by the Continental Congress. This year marks the 225th anniversary of the Stars and Stripes as the national flag.

as the national flag.
Since the horrible events of Sept. 11, we've experi Since the horrible events of Sept. 11, we've experi-enced a wave of flagmanin. Stores couldn't stock enough and flag makers couldn't print or sew enough because everyone wanted to show their colors. Some wanted to show national unity and a love for a coun-try under attack. Some Arab-Americans in addition to real feelings of patriotism also wanted to raise a flag as self protection against self proclaimed super-patriots.

nag as self protection against self preclaimed superstaticias.
We've gone through several heated arguments
about flag burning. Politicians looking for a cheap
and quick way to win favor have sponsored bills to
amend the Constitution to outlaw flag burning. Givil
libortarians have howled that any such ordinance,
law or amendment is an unconstitutional attack on
free speech.
Veterans are especially sensitive about the flag.
They've seen their comrades die or be maimed in
defense of their country, of their flag, Any attack on
the flag is an attack on them and their memories.
Thoir flag isn't just about country, it's about personal
sacrifice. Flags sir amotions.
They have a power that transcends their original
meaning. The battle flag of the Confederacy, the
Stars and Bars, is a lightning rod in our ongoing

racial drama. Some Southern whites claim with open faced sincerity that the flag as used in several Southern states is a reminder of their ancestry, a tribute to their heritage.

Southern blacks point out that heritage includes slavery and that the Stars and Bars only began appearing on state flags with the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the late 1950s. They also point out that many openly racist groups have used the flag as a symbol of their resistance to civil rights for years.

To radicals of the 1960s and 70s the American flag was a symbol for what they perceived as American imperialism, racial injustice and a war they didn't support. Burning that flag was less an act of anti-particular in their view was violating American ideals. As disrespectful, obnoxious and shortsighted as flag burning is, some of the worst descerations of the flag are by those who claim to honor it. Commercial interests are always attaching the flag to their product, everything from halter tops to beer cans, that only insult the flags meaning. Businesses and homes fly the flag in all kinds of weather; their flags are often tattered and dirty, treated with indifference.

The American flag is a beautiful sight waving in a breeze against a deep blue sky, I does not represent the current administration, the sitting Congress, the capitalist economic system or any set of marrow ideas about America.

It does represent the unity of the 50 states under a

capitalist economic system or any set of narrow ideas about America.

It does represent the unity of the 50 states under a written Constitution and Bill of Rights. It represents a long and sometimes bloody history of trying to expand and defend the principles of that Constitution. It represents the freedom to disagree, the freedom to speak out, the freedom to hisd contrary opinions because someday those contrary opinions may become accepted truth. It represents speaking truth to power without fear of reprisal.

It represents not only those brave men and women who gave their lives on a battle field but also those who proclaimed their opposition to slavery, those who stood up for their rights as workers to organize; those who stood up for their rights as workers to organize; those who proclaimed that women were the equal of men and should have the right to vote and those who marched against the lie of separate but equal.

marched against the lie of separate but equal.

It is and always should be a flag of freedom, not a

flag of oppression.

For all those reasons it is a grand old flag.

Hugh Gallagher is the managing editor of the Observer Newspapers. He can be reached by phone at (734)953-2149, by e-mail at hgal-lagher@oe.homecomm.net of by fax at (734)591-7279.



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