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opinion

Thursday, January 1, 1981

Can region save itself from permanent decline?

Southeast Michigan's problems are far worse than the 12 to 14 percent unemployment rates inflicted by the 1980 recession.

Population stopped growing in 1974, and there is evidence of a drain of people to the Sun Belt.

The housing industry, when it begins building again, will put up fewer brick homes because of the loss of bricklayers.

College placement directors are publicly urging graduates to seek their fortunes in other states. The tax money invested in public colleges to educate them will be lost to Michigan. Our best young talent is being siphoned off. Our problems remain.

While recovery of auto industry production is inevitable, the number of persons it will employ will be reduced. Historically, each recession has meant the industry learns how to build 10 million units with fewer and fewer workers.

The loss of jobs in the auto industry is no longer confined to blue collar workers. Since the 1975 downturn, skilled trades, technical and managerial jobs have disappeared as well.

There will be a delay in the political clout the suburbs were supposed to gain from the 1980 census while big city lawsuits against the Census Bureau are settled. Reapportionment may have to wait to 1984.

The economic conservatism of the Reagan Administration and the new U.S. Senate have been commented on. What most observers have missed, however, is the distinct *westward* orientation Washington will have in 1981. They won't be looking out for the industrial Northeast and Midwest.

YET THERE ARE some plusses that southeast Michigan shouldn't overlook.

In December, the governor and both parties in the Michigan Legislature removed the biggest blemish on our industrial image with the reform of workers compensation. Abuses will be curbed, benefits raised, and we only wish it could have taken less than six years to break the logjam.

Voters saw fit to resist wrecking state government and the educational system with the Tisch tax cut. Some taxpayer relief from soaring assessments is still desired, but there are signs it will come in 1981.

The one-time radicals of the 1950s who are now local government officials are able to vote tax breaks to induce General Motors to invest. There is widespread realization that capital, now scarce, can no longer be abused.

AN IMMENSE job needs to be done, not just in Washington but here in the state, if we are ever to achieve economic recovery.

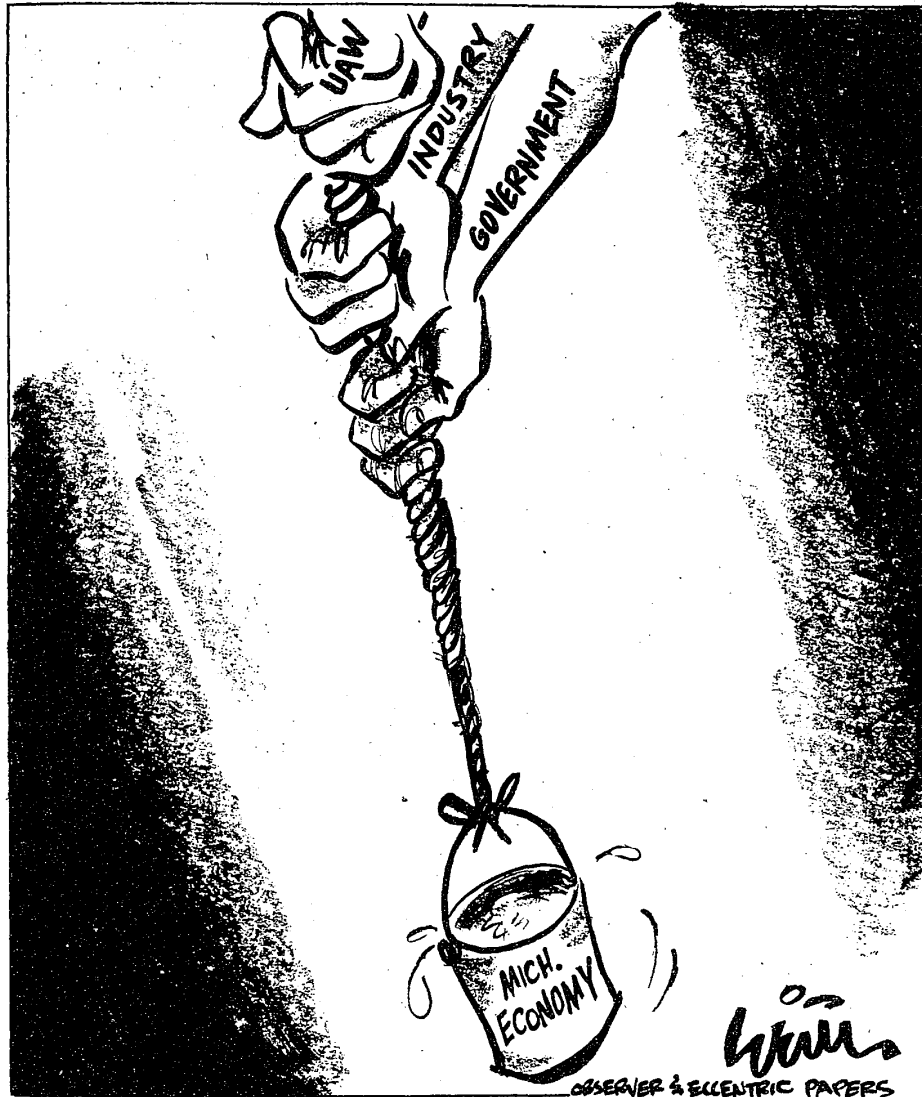
The congressional delegations of other states meet regularly, with Democrats and Republicans working together to take care of home plate. Michigan's congressional delegation, we understand, hasn't met in four years. That must be changed.

Most importantly, some long-range economic planning must be done in this state by a triumvirate — the three major universities, business and labor. We need to plan together to attract diversified industry.

For too many decades, it has been said that "When the nation has a cold, Michigan gets pneumonia." Well, in 1981, our problem is worse than pneumonia. Southeast Michigan is in danger of slipping into the kind of permanent decline that bed the South in the early years of the century and the New England states when they lost the textile industry after World War II.

Southeast Michigan will never die. But without united economic planning, we could shrink to a waist-high mediocrity.

Can we lift ourselves up by our economic bootstraps?



Uncle Sam aids college students

Inflation hurts everyone, but its effects must be particularly distressing to young folks trying to make it through college.

Tuition at public colleges has soared an average of 20 percent the last three years. Tuition at private schools went up 27 percent.

Remember, the Headlee tax limitation amendment we voted for doesn't affect public college tuition, admissions fees, enrollment fees, student activities fees and lab fees, because those fees aren't taxes.

Consider the case of a young person who has saved up money for college. At an inflation rate of 10 percent, his savings have shrunk 40 percent by his senior year.

Consider a student who is attending college with the life insurance left by a departed parent. The money may not last.

SO IT WAS with gladness in my heart that I read a newsletter from a liberal politician in Washington saying he, too, is concerned with the impact of inflation on college students.

Rather than fill up dismal newspaper columns with his lamentations, however, he got busy and began voting for some cures. I quote from his missive: "There is good news for students seeking financial aid for the first time. Recent amendments to the Higher Education Act have increased the limits for federal grants and loans."

"The annual limit that a student can receive as a Guaranteed Student Loan has increased from \$2,500 to \$3,000. The National Direct Student Loan limit was raised from \$1,250 to \$1,500 a year. The maximum a student can receive in a Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (now called a Pell Grant) will



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increase in steps from the current \$1,800 annual to \$2,600 in 1985.

To cover the cost of larger loans, interest rates on the loans were raised and the grace period for repayment was shortened.

"Following graduation, payments on the loan can now be deferred by public health officers, fulltime volunteers such as VISTA workers, professional interns and persons temporarily disabled."

"A new loan program by which parents can borrow up to \$3,000 annually and \$15,000 in total provides a cash flow resource. Repayment of the loan must begin within 60 days. The interest rate is 9 percent."

"Financial aid practices were expanded to serve students more efficiently. Applications were consolidated into a single form, and the definition of eligibility was clarified."

And so on.

IT IS CHEERING to know that our friendly federal government has concocted new, expanded and more efficient ways for college students to get into debt like the rest of us. If students are to be prepared for the real life world of suburbia, the sooner they get acquainted with debt, the better.

But I have to wonder whether the cure isn't part of the disease.

Wouldn't we do them a bigger favor by demanding less of the federal government, holding the line on student aid and 10 dozen other programs, stabilizing the money supply and halting inflation?

If we halted inflation, students might not need bigger loans in the first place.

Ring the bell - a tie that binds

In a few more hours, we will be saying farewell to the year 1980, possibly without many regrets.

The farewells will take many forms. Some folks will be jamming the nightclubs for a two-fold purpose: to bid goodbye to the old year and drink a toast to the new one.

There will be all sorts of celebrations, dining, dancing, whistle blowing, horn tooting and ringing of bells.

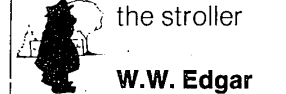
Others will be at home waiting for the stroke of midnight to watch the ball descend above a building on Times Square in New York and listening to the strains of the band on TV that will bring heart-felt memories of the late Guy Lombardo.

But The Stroller will be standing at the back door with Leona and any of our friends who wish to join us to carry out the old tradition of ringing the bell in the back yard to welcome the infant 1981.

RINGING THE OLD bell has been a ritual at our house for years as we were taught to ring out the old and ring in the new. How and where the tradition started The Stroller doesn't know, but it has been part of his life as far back as he can remember.

Many gatherings at the old bell have left fond memories. Many old friends have departed, and their passing has added to the tradition.

In the old days, bringing in the new year was always a time for celebrations at the country hotels in the Dutch country. It always started with a chicken and waffle dinner in the hotel dining room. And what a feast it was, along with the reminder



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

from the owner's wife to save room for the cake she had just baked.

As the hour of midnight approached, we were invited to the back yard to give the bell "a good ring."

With all of these hilarious events on a full stomach, there was one celebration that left a lasting memory — and it happened in church.

ON THIS PARTICULAR New Year's Eve, we were helping to welcome a new minister, a sturdy round Dutchman named Arthur Butz. He had shocked the "blue stocking" Presbyterians by wearing a black robe to deliver his sermon.

Along with the robe, he brought a lot of new ideas to the church, and one of these he put into play this night we were welcoming the new year. Everyone wondered what he was going to do as he had arranged the entire program.

First he announced a "watch night" service for 10:30 p.m., something we never had prior to his coming. The service was more or less a sing-along.

Finally, with only five minutes to go, the new minister stood at the pulpit and asked all of us to clasp hands in chain fashion with pew neighbors, and then pass out the side door to help ring the old church bell.

With that, the organist started playing "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds." Just imagine the scene. Candlelight service, clapping hands and singing "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds."

It was a moment that has lived through the years. And with that memory of the night in the little white church, The Stroller wishes you all a happy and prosperous New Year.