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To fight change is to resist the future

PERHAPS THE MOST difficult thing for a human being to accept, plan for and adjust to is change. It can be disruptive, frightening and even devastating.

But no matter how unsettling it may be, change is a certainty. And if we don't accept that and put a great deal of time and energy into looking and planning ahead, we will be left behind.

It's true for individuals, businesses, institutions, communities and countries.

The chairman of K mart Corp. went before the Troy Chamber of Commerce and its guests last week to offer advice on adapting to change — he called it an exciting challenge.

First, Bernard M. Fauber painted the un-pretty picture of Detroit's and Southeastern Michigan's current economic crisis.

Fauber selected his words carefully when he spoke of the glory days of the automobile industry being gone forever.

He told his listeners we must "stop blaming our problems on the unfair competition from the Japanese, Germans or Koreans" or on government taxation and high interest rates. Stop looking for excuses instead of solutions, he said.

MUCH ADVICE is being given on the changes that face us as we move away from an industrial and into an information-based society. It's a society in which workers and consumers are demanding and getting a greater voice in government, business and the marketplace.

Fauber advised his listeners to, first, adopt a can-do attitude, then analyze current and future social and market trends and make business decisions based on those studies.

Many business leaders, economists and others have offered similar advice. But what makes

Fauber and K mart speak with such authority is that that corporation is healthy today because it has followed and continues to follow that formula.

K mart — with world headquarters in Troy — is today the second largest general merchandise retailer in the country, employing more than 250,000 people and serving more than 80 percent of the American consumers.

SINCE FAUBER BECAME chairman of the board, most of his time and effort have been devoted to implementing change, to adjusting operations to the demands and wants of the marketplace.

He revealed how K mart used attitude, careful study and strategic planning to pull itself out of economic woes twice in the last 23 years.

The company, then known as S.S. Kresge Co., began "dying a not-so-slow death" in 1959 when the discount store revolution hit.

As a result of extensive study, the K mart concept was born. All of its managers are expected to be acutely aware of their marketplace. And they must adapt to changes in that marketplace.

Then, five years ago, K mart recognized and reacted to another change. The "disposable society" was changing. Consumers wanted quality, not just low prices. So the corporation began upgrading its merchandise and making stores more attractive.

It added personal computers, brand-name home improvement materials, better-quality bed and bath merchandise and better-quality apparel — for example, its Designer Depot concept.

When you're at the top or performing satisfactorily, you can get stuck in your ways, said Fauber. "We actually resist change, yet economic opportunity changes as the market and technology change. To survive, we, too, must change."

So must we all, Mr. Fauber. Thanks for your advice.

— Alice Collins



Nick Sharkey

U.S. report on schools is unheeded

It's been seven weeks since a blue ribbon committee issued its scathing report on the nation's schools called "A Nation at Risk." The title aptly describes a crisis in our educational system.

What has happened in local schools since "A Nation at Risk" was released? Frankly, not much.

After reading Observer & Eccentric Newspapers over the past few weeks, local educators have given responses which fall into two categories:

- (1) "They are talking about the other 'guy' — we are doing an exceptional job in our school district," and (2) "There is nothing we can do because it will cost more money while we are being forced to make budget cuts."
- Both responses are cop-outs. Some significant changes must be made in our local school systems.
- The evidence cited in the report is clear. Scores on standardized tests given high school students have dropped consistently over a 20-year period. The average school year in this country is 180 days, while in Japan it's 230 days. Most school children in the world attend classes for eight hours a day, while in the United States it is six hours a day. There are more school districts in the United States than there are physics teachers.

MOST OF US are not directly involved in running local schools. We do not make curriculum changes, order new books or hire new teachers.

Yet, we can make a difference. The most obvious is to pressure local school board members and administrators to put an emphasis on subject areas such as science, math, writing and foreign language.

Also, parents must share in the responsibility of educating their children. For example, the parents of 45,000 students in Cleveland public schools will help to improve their children's reading skills. These children failed a districtwide reading competency test given in May. Parents will be sent their child's test score and tips on how to help with reading skills. Children will be retested next year.

With a number of cooperations between parents and teachers could be started in your local school district.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR also has an important stake in the health of local schools. With poor schools, they eventually will end up hiring inferior employees.

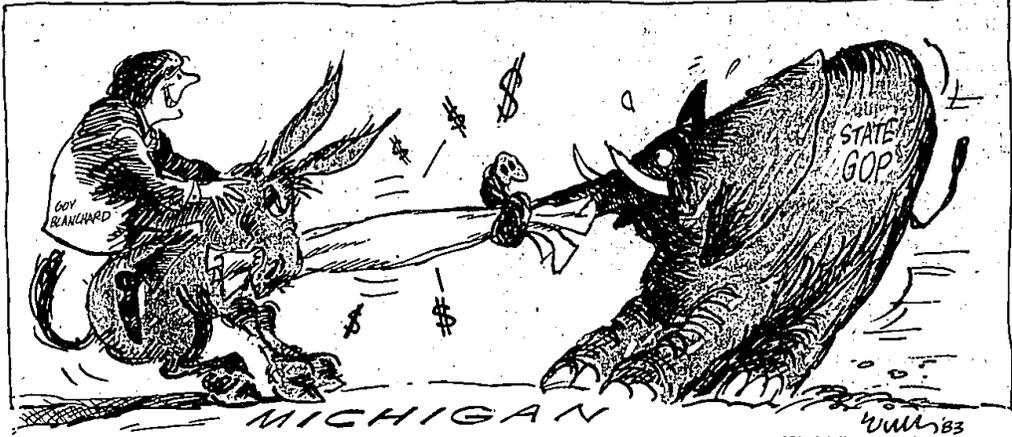
Businesses in suburban Detroit have little direct involvement in local schools. A pioneer elsewhere is Hewlett-Packard, which this year is making a \$20-million investment in education.

In Menlo Park, Calif., three school districts turned an empty elementary school into a computer institute for 200 top students. Hewlett-Packard and Intel will staff the school by loaning executives. At Santa Rosa, Calif., Hewlett-Packard is sending employees into high schools to teach one period of math, science or calculus and showing youngsters that their studies eventually translate into jobs.

In the past, too many reports and studies have been completed and only collect dust in someone's library. That shouldn't be permitted to happen to "A Nation at Risk." But that will be the result if we leave it entirely in the hands of professional educators. The stakes are too high for all of us not to become involved.

discover Michigan Bill Stockwell

DID YOU KNOW that Michigan's immense Lakes Huron and Michigan are more than 575 feet above sea level? Lake Superior, the world's second largest inland sea, is more than 600 feet above sea level. At one point, it is 1,333 feet deep. It is large enough to contain the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maryland and New Jersey combined.



Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Becoming partisan issue State's 1st reform: welfare or colleges?

ONE THING at a time — that's Gov. James J. Blanchard's style.

First the income tax increase to put the state's fiscal house in order. Then the summer jobs bill.

But what will be next? Will it be welfare reform — or higher education? It makes a big difference, and it is becoming a partisan issue in Lansing.

Ever since the late 1960s, the Department of Social Services' budget has been eating Michigan education alive, rising from 12 percent of state appropriations to the 40 percent range this year.

Readers of this column know by now that the increase has been steady and can't be blamed on President Reagan and the depression. There has been a direct, percentage point for percentage point decrease in education funding as social services has gobbed up more and more.

SO HOW DO we proceed to correct it?

Last week Republican state senators attempted a direct shift of funds out of social services to colleges and universities. Going in, they must have been pretty certain they would lose, but they were trying to make a point. In the words of Sen. Doug



Tim Richard

Cruce, R-Troy, a co-sponsor of the measure:

"Michigan ranks third in the nation in per-client support for social services, yet ranks only 35th in support of higher education. The intentions of the Blanchard administration and the Democrat majority in the Senate were made crystal clear, with welfare taking a top priority and education occupying one of the lower rungs on the ladder."

IT'S NOT such a simple thing, however, to take \$7.3 million out of one pocket and put it in another.

Social services is a massive department. One chief source of spending is Medicaid, which is rising at 12-15 percent a year, the last time I attended a legislative briefing. It's the health providers, not the welfare beneficiaries, who are soaking it up.

Most are old, disabled or children

Welfare: the stereotypes are misleading



Bob Wisler

welfare recipients are black mothers with large families who cheat who would rather lie around and collect welfare than work.

For example, one point in regard to Cruce's statement about "having the state take care of them forever":

OF THOSE collecting Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), 89 percent had been on ADC less than two years, 36 percent had been on ADC less than a year. Only 5 percent of the cases had been active nine years or more.

Of those receiving general assistance (GA) given to eligible single people who have less than \$50 in assets), 78 percent had been receiving assistance for a year or less.

The statistics seemingly indicate that people do not want to collect welfare and try to end their dependence as soon as possible. And yet recipients are trying to do this during one of the state's most depressing economic downturns, with unemployment near 16 percent and notices about jobs draw-

ing hundreds to thousands of applicants.

With 40 percent of Highland Park, 30 percent of Detroit and 20 percent of Wayne County collecting some form of assistance, it would seem that welfare is a black problem. But, according to DSS's most recent statistics, almost 50 percent of those receiving ADC, GA or food stamps in the state are white. About 46 percent are black. Hispanics account for two percent and Native Americans, Asians and Polynesians make up the other small percentage. The average family size on ADC is a little over 3 persons.

ONE OF the most frequently asked welfare questions is: Why don't they work for their money? According to the DSS, about half of those who receive funds are under 18 years and 70 percent are dependent children or elderly or disabled adults.

Among the 30 percent who could be defined as able-bodied, many are women with young preschool children or people who are woefully deficient in job skills. In this economy, finding regular paying jobs may even be impossible.

The examples could go on but space doesn't permit. The point is that welfare spending is a target of those who are demanding cuts for good and bad reasons. The myths and stereotypes are misleading and should be avoided while the state deliberately and successfully attempts to decide what facets of the social services budget can be pruned.

A willy-nilly attempt to chop funds may, in the long run, be more damaging than helpful.

Another major program is aid to families with dependent children, or ADC. The number of single-parent (usually female) families has been soaring.

How do you make cuts? Forget the cheap talk about "welfare cheaters." How do you get medical practitioners and hospitals to hold their bills level or reduce them? Which motherless families do you withhold grocery and rent money from?

WHEN I interviewed candidate Blanchard last fall, he talked about eliminating the duplication in higher education in Michigan.

And his fellow Democrat, Sen. Philip Mastin of Pontiac, talked about a blue-ribbon panel that would look at ways to have colleges specialize, perhaps reducing the number of law schools, medical schools and graduate programs as the college-age population declines.

But Blanchard, as I noted at the outset, is a one-time-at-a-time guy. Which will he choose to attack first — social services, which is gobbling up 40 percent of his budget, or higher education, which has been shrinking as a priority for nearly two decades? My inclination is to say welfare is out of control and should get our first attention. The Republicans at least have the right target, even if they don't have a solid plan for shooting at it.