

points of view

Parents must monitor state education tickets

"Now, for instance, you got Feldman for treasurer. That's perfect. There people know how to handle money, I know what I mean? Then you got Salogorsky for district attorney — to keep an eye on Feldman . . . Then you got a Mick — O'Reilly — to make sure the graft is equally distributed. And you get Nelson, an American, to make the rest of them look respectable."

That's ticket balancing by Archie Bunker, America's favorite bigot on "All in the Family."

It's no joke. In Michigan, the Democratic Party balances its education ticket that way — four men, four women, one Hispanic, a black or two, and maybe someone from the Upper Peninsula.

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Usually the candidates for the six education posts — University of Michigan, Michigan State and Wayne State — rise or fall with the fortunes of the party that nominated them.



Tim Richard

IF I WERE a parent or grandparent who had plunked down \$6,700 in the Michigan Education Trust for a newborn's college tuition, I would protect my investment.

I'd spend an extra \$50 a year by participating in a political party and supporting candidates pledged to hold down tuition costs.

I'd run for precinct delegate in 1990 (it's too late this year, although

there may be vacancies to which you can be appointed at a district convention). And I would try to become a delegate to the state convention. It's not difficult.

The state convention is where the ticket is balanced, as Archie Bunker indicated.

But it's no longer appropriate to balance the ticket by gender, ethnic group and union affiliation. There are some honest-to-goodness issues.

SURE, 82,500 kids have been signed up for the MET. The trust fund will earn interest and will cover the kids' college tuitions when they reach 18.

That is, if the university boards don't raise tuitions faster than MET can earn interest and dividends.

But my middle-class neighbors and colleagues have been asking dozens of questions about whether MET can work. "What will happen if —" their questions begin.

Is it safe to invest in MET? Yes, if people safeguard MET by political action.

This year there will be 165,000 parents and maybe more grandparents who have a vested interest in limiting tuition increases. Next year there may be 330,000; then nearly 500,000 by 1990.

That's a formidable bloc of sophisticated voters. Unlike the American Association of Retired People, the social services providers and the paving contractors, this bloc isn't out for favors. It's protecting its investment in its kids.

A POLITICIAN serving on a university board must learn it's safer wrestling a she-bear with cubs than crossing those parents and grandparents by voting double-digit tuition hikes.

Every legislator must get several dozen individually written letters asking them to vote for appropriations that will let colleges keep pace with enrollment and inflation so that tuitions won't have to be raised.

The Democratic State Convention is Aug. 28 in Detroit's Cobo Hall. Republicans meet there Sept. 10. Sessions are open to the public.

How will the university board candidates be nominated? Archie Bunker's way? Or the parent-investors way?

Concentrate on education Bowman, MET hit a nerve

HOW WOULD our favorite "Beverly Hills Cop" feel about a dress code at Mumford High School?

Those who follow Mr. Foley's cinematic antics know his favorite outfit is a Mumford T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans, even when traveling among California's elite. But it's not the T-shirts and well-worn jeans that are causing problems at the Detroit public high school.

It's the popular jewelry and designer clothes that are apparently causing peer pressure and worse — violence to the wearers if they don't relinquish their possessions.

So to avoid problems this fall, students will have a uniform of sorts. Expensive items, including gold chains, will be prohibited under a new dress code.

Another Detroit public school — an elementary — has actually adopted a uniform for its students.

PERHAPS WE haven't reached the sharp point of a knife or the blunt end of a gun barrel in Farmington-area secondary schools, but we certainly have the same peer pressures.

Those pressures can, at times, be as deadly to self-esteem and learning as knives and guns are to life.

Mumford has a better idea and other districts and schools might do well to watch its progress, and consider the idea.



Casey Hans

But dress codes and uniforms have a function. They direct student attention to learning — not to a focus on someone's new outfit.

I never thought I would advocate a uniform of any sort after nine years of parochial white blouses, pleated plaid jumpers and royal blue skirts. These were the horrible, wool requirements we wore day in, and day out until the skirt pleats were worn flat.

Boys fared no better with blue everything: pants, shirts, socks and ties.

But dress codes and uniforms have a function. They direct student attention to learning — not to a focus

on someone's new outfit.

THAT'S THE point. Officials at Mumford and other schools who advocate a dress code, or a uniform, believe it will help students concentrate on their education.

It eliminates the division between students who can afford nice, new expensive items and those who cannot.

It will allow students growing into adulthood to remember their history, math and English, and not simply what trends and clothes were popular during their senior year.

Critics might argue that a person's dress is a statement of personality. That taking away choice will neutralize students into a common mass. That individuality will be lost.

THAT NOT allowing choice is an infringement on personal freedoms.

They are good arguments. But our education system represents the future for all of us, and in many ways the system is in trouble.

I say despite the arguments, it's time we all buckled down to give our youngsters — urban and suburban — a good education. The more effectively learning can be emphasized, the better.

And if there have to be a few more rules to accomplish that, then so be it.

THE FAMILY sits around the dinner table. Looking at their youngest child's favorite University of Michigan T-shirt, the parents mentally tell themselves that it is time to tell their children of a stark reality — for this family, some universities are financially out of reach.

Bob Bowman doesn't like the picture.

"The only thing that should stand between a child and a university should be the child's (ability)," he says.

Bowman, the treasurer for the State of Michigan, is a star in this state. He is a bright, young, aggressive man who makes you realize that you can't remember the name of many previous state treasurers.

Bowman is also a good interviewer. Fueled apparently by Coca-Cola — he brings along his own jumbo cup of Coke to an 8:30 a.m. appointment, a prudent move since his hosts only have Pepsi to offer — Bowman is an unabashed, intense and forceful proponent of the state's new prepaid college tuition plan called the Michigan Education Trust.

AT FIRST glance, it is an odd cloak for him to wear. A financial talent, he is for the moment foregoing certain Wall Street fortunes for lower paying public service. Single and childless, his passions are direct-



Rich Perlberg

Bowman, the treasurer for the State of Michigan, is a star in this state.

ed to a program embraced by the parents of the state.

He has struck a nerve. In a five-day span earlier this month, 82,495 people applied for enrollment in the Michigan Education Trust.

This is not a something-for-nothing plan. Participants must pay a minimum of about \$5,700 (depending on the child's age, which is paid in a lump sum or financed with monthly payments to a lending institution. In return, the child's tuition is guaranteed at any state college or university. The program does not address other major costs such as room and board, or textbooks.

The widespread interest in the

fund — the state had projected only about 5,000 applicants for the first year — demonstrates both the parental desire for their children to attend college and their concern about tuition costs. The 82,000-plus applications came without a dime being spent on advertising.

"It caught us by surprise, and it shouldn't have," said Bowman, who stresses the obvious: Adequate education no longer is served by K-12 learning; at least two to four years of college is necessary.

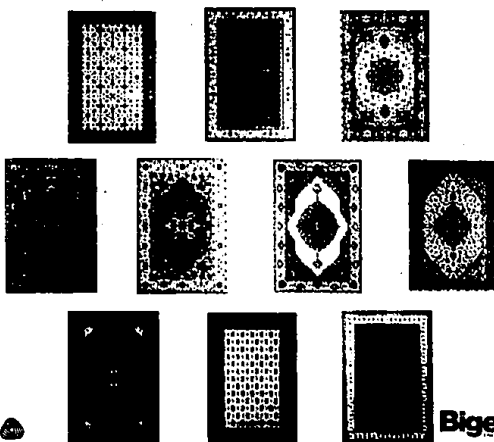
THE MICHIGAN Education Trust has its critics. Some say the guarantee has holes; others believe the fund cannot earn enough to keep pace with tuition increases.

Bowman, a pretty genial man, admittedly gets "huffy" at such talk. Financial consultants may be worried more about losing \$80 million in commissions, he suggests. Critics should do some homework before slamming a program 2½ years in the making, he says.

The fact is, he maintains, the state has given his trust a better guarantee than any other fund in Michigan. That's as it should be, he adds, since education is the cornerstone of Michigan's future.

To Bowman, his treasured Coke notwithstanding, the Michigan Education Trust is the real thing.

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