



Eighties present challenge

by Matthew W. Prophet
Superintendent of Schools

These are different times. The decade of the 1970s saw a visible uneasiness and mistrust of America's hallowed institutions. Governments, schools, big business, the military, law enforcement agencies, and numerous other public institutions suffered credibility gaps perhaps as deep as Richard Nixon's during the depth of Watergate. The 1970s brought a gradual weakening of the American economy, as the stimulus of the war in Southeast Asia began to wear off, and inflation started to creep its greedy influence into our monthly incomes. The energy crisis became conspicuous, as oil producers demanded huge price increases, thereby aggravating inflation, and further greasing the skids for the downward dive of the dollar in international markets. Also, the Third World became more vocal, more astute in organizing to demand equality from the leaders of the international community. This is a development to which we have yet to fully adjust.

At best, with all things considered, the seventies were times of trouble. Therefore, the logical question now is, what will happen in the 1980s?

This decade will almost certainly be one of challenge and opportunity on new and uncharted grounds. The 1980s will spawn a host of new civil rights issues on such uncharted terrain as high technology, foreign policy, and energy development. But for all of the new developments, the central issues in the eighties will be the same central issues which have been with us in the past... racism, poverty, and the struggle for justice in American society.

The eighties have begun, as most decades do, with the firing of guns and the saying of brave new words.

Another year, another decade, another chapter, a new beginning, another chance.

And with this chance comes a rush of important questions. These questions are born of chances missed and decades wasted. We must ask ourselves, what is different this time? Will racism, poverty, and inequality be eliminated this time? Will we turn the corner? Will we see the light? Or will the dream, during

the decade of the eighties, once again be deferred?

The national mood has signaled the weakening, if not the end, for some time of "liberalism" and "big government with a helping hand." The election of Ronald Reagan has brought, at the very least, a new era. The nation's leadership has become more hardened and inflexible, more cold and unsympathetic.

In this national posture, social welfare programs must be reduced. This feeling is being turned into policy by people who are unconcerned about the plight of those less fortunate in our society. The moral majority calls programs and services developed during the sixties and seventies "complete failures." But most of the people in the moral majority have no way of measuring the success or failure of such programs and services. They never saw the depression in the black community during the 1950s and 1960s. They never saw the black community before community action programs were developed, or the progress since. They have no understanding of the skill levels of black youth prior to the creation of the opportunities industrialization centers. And they do not know what has happened since. Social welfare programs are being framed by a "sting" operation which is setting them up to look like nothing but failures, when the reality is just the opposite.

Schools as case in point

The public schools of this nation are a case in point. For the past twenty years and more, this nation has demanded that the public schools forge good citizens, feed the hungry, compensate for social disadvantages, alleviate prejudices, instill sacred values, discipline the unruly, buttress the unstable, inculcate an appreciation for the arts, transmit a common culture in the midst of diversity, incorporate youngsters with physical or mental handicaps, and exalt the life of the mind.

All of this has been demanded at a time of skepticism toward the public and a dwindling of economic support. But our needs remain the same. Despite all of this, the national government responds with nega-

tivism.

We get drastic and actually cruel reductions in nutrition programs. After years of wrenching efforts to integrate schools, we get the financial rug snatched from beneath our feet in mid-air. After raising the achievement levels of thousands of students who would have been otherwise lost in the maze of illiteracy, the funds for compensatory education of students who are behind is being slashed and sacrificed on the altar of excessive defense spending.

This is what public education has received for being the one institution in American society which has done the most to bring the realities of democracy in line with the ideals of democracy. This is the national mood.

If all of this were not enough, there is more bad news. The Reagan Administration has agreed to push the tuition tax credit proposal.

The tuition tax credit proposal is a concrete example of the present administration's lack of appreciation for public education. This proposal will rob from the many to give to the few. The program could cost as much as \$4.7 billion and the bulk of the money will go to the people who need it the least.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the tuition tax credit idea is the fact that it misrepresents the flexibility and quality of the public schools. As a function of national policy and direction, it says that parents who think the public schools are poorly run and inefficient in instruction are wrong. And the truth is, they are wrong.

In the Portland Public Schools, a parent can find every option and variation of educational program. If the neighborhood school does not satisfy, we have magnet programs. If the regular curricular program does not meet one's needs, we have basic skill programs and fundamental schools. The tuition tax credit legislation suggests that this is not the case. And that is patently false.

Where public education is concerned, as a very necessary part of making a democracy function with an intelligent citizenry, the present

mood of the nation is wrong. The tuition tax credit is just a concrete example. As a public policy, it is evil. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. When evil men seek to perpetuate an unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real order of justice."

Our challenge

And this is our challenge. It is the challenge of the eighties. It is the challenge for Portland.

Portland has a chance now to reverse this trend of negativism at the local level. In a remarkable display of confidence and hope for the future, citizens approved the proposed new tax base for our schools on May 18th.

This election was as important to the City as to the District. It is a mandate to continue to provide excellence in education for all children in all schools. Equal educational opportunities are the guideline for the future.

We can now push ahead with realizing the student achievement goal and engage in long-range planning to improve the quality of the schools.

Portland has met the challenge, but we cannot relax.

Our immediate task is to begin building a cooperative spirit in every part of this community. It is a task which the Board of Education and the Administration must take as seriously as possible.

No aspect of the community can be ignored. No socio-economic class can be forgotten. No problem can be faced with indifference. No avenue can be left untraveled to bring the good people of this city together around one most important goal... the preparation and development of our children.

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Washington Hot Line

by Congressman Ron Wyden

Earlier this spring, I sent a questionnaire to Third District residents asking their opinions on the economy and other issues of concern to Oregon and America. Nearly 17,000 people responded. Following are highlights of those responses.

Taken as a whole, the responses to the questionnaire reflect a great deal of concern for the directions the current Administration is headed in.

For example, in response to a question about whether the Administration's legislative program is basically sound, or whether major changes are needed, 59 per cent of those responding said they believed major changes are in order. Only 17 per cent believed the program is basically sound, while 22 per cent believed more time is needed to determine whether the program will work.

Other questionnaire results show:
•78 per cent of those responding believe that budget cuts have been more unfair to some groups than others, while 19 per cent believe the cuts have been fairly distributed across society.

•To help reduce the budget, 68 per cent would first cut defense spending. The majority (51 per cent) would modify the tax cut as a second step to reduce the deficit.

•67 per cent of the respondents

support reauthorization of a strong Clean Air Act, while 29 per cent believe requirements of the Act should be relaxed.

•Asked to identify the statement which most accurately reflects their views on defense, 44 per cent said they support a strong defense but believe there is a great deal of waste in the Administration's defense budget which could be cut. 7 per cent said the Administration, by calling for sharply increased military spending, is headed in the right direction. 45 per cent believed both of the other alternatives commit too much money to the military, and that some of the money should be spent instead on domestic social needs.

•68 percent of those answering the questionnaire said they do not believe Interior Secretary James Watt is headed in the right direction in taking stands in favor of economic development when some say those stands jeopardize the environment. 20 percent said they believe Watt is headed in the right direction.

Q. Health and Human Services' Secretary Richard Schweiker has proposed dropping the requirement for annual inspection of nursing homes, hospitals and other health care facilities. What do you think of this proposal?

A. I am very concerned about the

implications for quality of care.

Under Secretary Schweiker's proposal, hospitals with a history of compliance with health and safety rules would be subject to regular inspections only every three years; nursing homes with good records, every two years. Homes with poor records allegedly would be inspected more often, although inspectors would no longer be required to revisit problem nursing homes within 90 days to check to see whether deficiencies had been corrected.

Secretary Schweiker's proposal also would turn over accreditation of nursing homes from state agencies to the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals.

The dangers for patients in these proposals are obvious. Nursing home patients are some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Many are without family or friends to advocate on their behalf—without a spokesman to ensure they have the best possible care, and that attention is paid to their health and safety.

Annual inspections were instituted to help guarantee such basic necessities to nursing home patients. By reducing the number of required inspections—and by placing accreditation of homes in the hands of a private group—we open the door for increased abuses. And that is something we cannot tolerate.

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