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Viewpoint

A-1 School Is a Good Investment

By GEORGE WILSON
Of the Editorial Page Staff

With taxes and costs of government going up and up, public officials are seeking desperately to divert blame from themselves. And school buildings make a convenient whipping boy. After all, education is a major cause of high taxes and high government costs—and those brand new school buildings that seem to be rising everywhere not only look expensive, they ARE expensive.

Governor Shapp has been leading the attack. At a recent news conference he took aim at "extravagant school building costs" and solemnly intoned:

"School buildings should not be monuments to the vanity of school boards or superintendents or to architects or engineers. They are intended to be serviceable, functional buildings which ought to be built as inexpensively as possible while still meeting the standards of health and safety."

And, a few days later, addressing a group of educators in Pittsburgh, the governor was sounding the same refrain:

"For some time now I have been speaking out forcefully against the tendency of local school boards to build school buildings which are unnecessarily grandiose—Taj Mahals! I have been in the habit of calling them. One of the troubles with Taj Mahals is that the local taxpayers can't afford them . . . Buildings don't teach. They may make it possible to teach more effectively, but their contribution to the task is marginal, not central. If resources are going to be scarce in the years ahead—and I have suggested why I think they will be—that shouldn't be powerful inspiration to spend those resources where they will have the greatest impact on the quality of what happens in the classroom—on teacher salaries, and on books and bunsen burners."

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Mr. Shapp's rhetoric makes good copy—but is it good advice? I don't think so.

Applying economy, practicality and common sense to school building projects is essential, of course, so we can avoid being fleeced by our children or ourselves by skimping on school construction to save money for other purposes that may not deserve as high a priority?

As a matter of fact, a good case can be made for precisely the opposite viewpoint from that taken by the governor. There is entirely too much pressure on school officials these days to cut construction costs to the bone—and the results are beginning to show in the buildings.

Cost consciousness, a healthy trait within reasonable limits, almost becomes stifling at Philadelphia Board of Education meetings when school planners with innovative ideas inevitably encounter critics who call anything beyond four walls and a few desks and chairs an "unnecessary frill." And suburban school boards are running into the same kind of criticism as tax rates go up.

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If a new school building is to be merely a replacement of what we had 75 years ago, why bother building anything new at all? Just patch up the old one and make it do. Or tack on an addition and let teachers improvise.

And the governor's line about "books and bunsen burners" sounds disturbingly similar to the same excuses that were given for years to the teachers and parents and children in the slums of Philadelphia. It was argued that poor kids who live in rundown housing wouldn't feel uncomfortable in fancy schools anyway—and probably wouldn't take care of them either. It was said that a good teacher could provide a good education even if the plaster was falling and the paint peeling.

That's true, of course. A dedicated teacher and a willing child need no school at all—but that's no reason for not building one that can bring out the best in both.

Ask real estate and industrial development and business people what factors keep property values up and attract economic growth and more job opportunities and they will invariably put good schools at or near the top of the list.

A city or town with second-rate schools is second-rate, period.

Charles Bartlett

Hoover Could Be Issue in '72

WASHINGTON.—The Hoover issue is expanding in a way which will do little to advance the cause of replacing the FBI's patriarch with a younger man who has limited tenure.

It is unpleasant to throw rocks at a proud, egocentric old patriot but he has backed up the exit by which he might take a graceful leave. The rocks spring from the frustrations of those who believe that Hoover's age has become a liability in his role, a detriment to the national interest.

The massive new building into which Hoover wants to lead his 1968 agents has barely reached the level of Pennsylvania Avenue. The elaborate substructure gives a hint of what to expect but Mr. Hoover did not, the architects say, make any reach for special grandeur.

But the $126 million structure will not be finished until 1974. If he stays until then, Hoover will be an issue in the election of 1972, an increasingly isolated and embittered old man, and a source of recurring embarrassment to the Nixon Administration. From a symbol of law and order, he could decline into an impediment.

The Nixon officials are already taking a highly ambiguous line on Hoover. Attorney General Mitchell is playing to the conservatives with shrill praise for the old man.

Aides even closer to Nixon have been leaking their acknowledgments that Hoover is a problem. The tight loyalty which transformed agents and experts into a monolithic wall of support for the Director is collapsing and some now concede, to persons they trust, that Hoover is no longer doing the job well.

"They keep hinting for him to retire, but he's getting more stubborn in his old age."

Majority Leader Hale Boggs was provoked into attacking Hoover by disappointment over a comment by Mitchell that the President did not plan to press for the old man's resignation. House members had brought him many complaints and some solid evidence regarding FBI wiretaps but Boggs had not been anxious to start the dispute as long as it appeared that Hoover might be headed for retirement.

From that point the controversy has gone off the track. Boggs can only establish that the FBI secured the record of one phone call by one congressman. This is no real issue to raise against Hoover when the real question is whether he remains capable of running a bureau with a $200 million budget and files which bulge with sensitive information.

There is solid evidence that he does not. He has grown increasingly guilty of the random circulation of gossip collected by his men. A number of stories concerning the sexual peculiarities of prominent individuals are known to have been launched by him.

But the possession of this scandal is a powerful political weapon and it is not at all clear that the Democrats now poised to investigate Hoover will enjoy the exercise.

An inquiry into the conduct of a man whose name is synonymous with integrity is not apt to be an appealing spectacle.

So the Democrats wiser move will be to hold hearings on a reform which will guarantee that the next FBI director does not become a Frankenstein. Various bills have been proposed to specify the tenure at 10 or 15 years and preclude reappointment.

The hearings will bring the problem to public attention without making a case against Hoover. Perhaps they will induce him to take everyone off the hook by stepping down.

Evans & Novak

Phone Call Indicates Politics in Calley Case

WASHINGTON.—Suspicion that President Nixon's motives in entering the Calley case were political are reinforced by the fact he telephoned his House floor leader, Rep. Gerald Ford of Michigan, to check congressional sentiment before his intervention.

That has produced sober second thoughts among a minority of thoughtful Republican congressmen worried that their President is playing politics on a sensitive judicial question. Besides that Mr. Nixon's call to Ford generated talk—which certainly seems untrue—that he is considering a pardon for Lt. William L. Calley Jr.

What's more, a handful of White House aides feel the President was not only playing politics but bad politics. They believe the hysterical public reaction against the court martial conviction of Calley for murder at My Lai had subsided when the President burst in.

He would have been better advised, they feel, to keep quiet or indorse blindfold justice dispensed under written law.

On March 31, two days after Calley's conviction, the President placed an early evening call from San Clemente to Ford, the House minority leader, in Washington. He noted the White House was swamped with protests and wondered whether the same was true on Capitol Hill. Ford was then asked by the President to sound out congressmen's reaction to the news that he was considering a wide range of options in dealing with Calley.

Ford related this conversation the next morning, April 1, over breakfast to Michigan's Republican congressmen, giving the impression Mr. Nixon was ready to intervene. Although three were one or two dissenters, the congressmen were delighted that the President was following public opinion.

In the evening conversation, there was talk of pardoning Calley. Some congressmen got the idea Mr. Nixon the night before had discussed a pardon. But Ford told us flatly the President did not mention pardoning, and several congressmen at the breakfast say Ford did not either. Nevertheless, used Ford as a conduit for the idea Mr. Nixon wanted to get out some exemplary talk.

REP. FORD
. . . checked congressional reaction

Garry Wills

Tear Gas Is Humane In 'Certain Situations'

The Senate is finally getting around to ratification of the 1925 Geneva Protocol against chemical and biological warfare. That agreement was aimed, of course, at the use of World War I mustard gas. We didn't use such gases in World War II, so why go through the formality of saying we won't use them in the future?

Oddly enough, we should sign the Protocol in order to specify some exemptions to it. Not only did we not use mustard gas in World War II—out of a fear that our gas would bring total retaliation—we did not use even tear gas. That meant we had to clear "pill boxes" in the South Pacific with "nonchemical" flame throwers.

But a flame thrower IS chemical? Sure. And so is any firearms mechanism. The taboo was on gas in the vulgar sense. And it still is. Senator Fulbright, who has waged useful wars on war, is trying to have tear gas and defoliants included in our understanding of the Protocol—since both have been used in Vietnam. He argues that we could use tear gas to flush people out into a murderous fire of bullets.

Yes, it could be used that way. So—with greater suffering—can the old flamethrowers or the newer napalm. Tear gas adds no suffering, (though (in this hypothesis) it does not subtract much. On the other hand, one may only want to capture men, and for that tear gas is far more humane and effective than the human incineration we call nonchemical.

Fulbright's position is an example of indiscriminate opposition to all things connected with the war. And it echoes the left-wing assaults on domestic use of CN gas and "Mace." Obviously, it is better not to be doused with either of these agents. And, naturally enough, those who have undergone the experience are going to denounce it. They will claim in court that they were peaceful, there was no need for "crowd control."

But—face it—sometimes there is need for crowd dispersal, or even mass arrests, as well as for individual arrests. And I have seen examples of them all. Seen people wrestled and clubbed, seen dogs used, seen gassing and the use of Mace. Few people realize what a huge leap forward was supplied by Mace (around 1967) and the "Pepper Fogger" (in 1968).

Before them, there was no safe immobilizer of individuals—most of the chemical agents that caused harm and were called "Mace" were actually different chemicals differently delivered.

Yes, tear gas is humane in certain situations—not only in foreign wars but in domestic encounters. We would look foolish, wouldn't we, condemning as too cruel for use on foreigners what we rely on for riot suppression in dealing with our own citizens?

Columnists' Reaction

Nixon's Plan Pleased Few

Following are excerpts of comments by various columnists on President Nixon's announcement that he plans to withdraw an additional 100,000 troops from Vietnam:

By WILLIAM S. WHITE

President Nixon has crossed the deep, dark river of doubt and indecision on Vietnam and no man can now doubt that he has the courage to resist the swelling demands for a de facto surrender there.

That he has got the guts to throw off this pressure, much of it coming from senators of his own party far more concerned about their own reelection in 1972 than his own, has been made perfectly plain in his latest address to the nation.

And yet an aching question remains. Is he going to have the firepower to accelerate the withdrawal of our forces, free our prisoners of war in what is in fact a gathering flight from Vietnam, and maintain — all at the same time — the world's confidence in the credibility of what was once a worldwide, genuine deterrent to Communist aggression?

When he says in substance that the South Vietnamese now have the combat capability — immensely heightened by our assistance in them in the Cambodian and Laotian operations — to prevent a Communist swallowing of Indochina, this columnist, for one, has no question whatever of his sincerity.

But what men (and even Presidents) think may be the case and what may actually be the case can sometimes be two morally different things. The long and short of it is that the President has given a terrible hostage to fortune here.

His bravery in rejecting the crudest of demands that he present the Communists here and now with the inestimable gift of a promise to get out on a specific date, unilaterally and regardless of what might then be the military position or our forces, cannot be contested by any fair observer.

Had he succumbed to this, even with some mumbo-jumbo insisting that he was not doing so, at that instance the United States of America would have lost the first war in its history.

By DON OBERDORFER
Of the Washington Post

The American people had been led to expect "some indication as to the end of the tunnel," but President Nixon's Vietnam address offered only more gradual withdrawal at a slightly increased rate.

Mr. Nixon's "steady course" address is unlikely to quiet the rising political discord about the war, nor check for long the steady dwindling of public support for his Vietnam policy.

It should be noted that Mr. Nixon left himself room for much larger withdrawals in the election year of 1972 — though he gave no guarantee at this time that they can or will be ordered.

In deciding to increase slightly the troop withdrawal rate and project it to Dec. 1, Mr. Nixon chose to do none of the things that would have made a major political impact in the United States.

"Oh, get lost!"

—He refused to set a date for total and final withdrawal as the majority of Democrats in the House and Senate have asked in caucus resolutions. He declared that "our goal is total American withdrawal from Vietnam" but declared that to announce a target date "would serve the enemy's purpose and not our own."

—He did not announce that the United States "ground combat" role had ended, giving way to a support-advisory-airpower role. This chance in the semantical description of the U. S. war effort has been long expected.

—He did not announce that it is now possible to fight the Vietnam war without sending draftees to fight. The all-volunteer force for Vietnam remains for a future decision.

Had he announced any of these things now, Mr. Nixon left himself the option to do any or all of these things later, if the struggle abroad permits them, and the struggle at home seems to require them.

He did little to enhance the peace of mind of the incumbent politicians and wavering supporters of his own regime at home. The Nixon answer was not what many senators and representatives of his own party had been hoping for, nor what they had been asking for in recent messages sent to the White House.

As he has before, the President told the American people that he should be held accountable for his political pledges on Vietnam. He declared that he had pledged in 1968 "to end American involvement in the war."

That is a different phraseology than he customarily used in 1968. In that political year, he declared more simply that "the war must be ended." He did not spell out how he would do it, or how soon. That question remains today.

By PETER LISAGOR
Of the Chicago Daily News

President Nixon has decided he can weather a renewed public storm over the Vietnam war.

He has declined, in politely defiant words, to yield to demands for a fixed date for ending U. S. involvement in the conflict and reaffirmed his intention to stick with his plan for a measured and slightly accelerated withdrawal of American troops.

His announcement Wednesday that 100,000 additional troops will be brought home between May 1 and Dec. 1 fell short of the expectations of members of his own party for a more rapid withdrawal rate.

The President's speech was seen here as unlikely to dampen the antiwar sentiment or to discourage protesters planning to demonstrate here later this month. It also was certain to leave his critics in Congress unsatisfied, for the clamor for a "date certain" for withdrawal has grown and has started to embrace Republican senators who have muted their criticism thus far.

Mr. Nixon apparently turned aside the advice of some highly placed Administration officials, who reportedly urged him to move faster to extricate the country from the war. But the course he outlined is consistent with his previous announcements and arguments against fixing a deadline for withdrawal.

By ROBERT C. TOTH
Of the Los Angeles Times

There was a sense of finality in the President's words that the day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight, and that this goal can be reached through Vietnamization.

And Vietnamization has, not will, succeed, he said.

The hold on it by the South Vietnamese not the people of security for an indefinite period, is some had read in his previous aim, but only a reasonable chance to survive as a free people once American troops leave.

The new withdrawal rate is admittedly lower than would be expected if Vietnamization has already succeeded as the President claimed. But it is understandable insurance against future political and military uncertainties in South Vietnam.

A more rapid pullout rate could easily undermine the stability and confidence of the Saigon regime as it looks toward the Presidential election in the fall. And only in the fall will there be meaningful intelligence estimates of the Communist potential — measured by the supplies that flow again down the Ho Chi Minh trail — for significant attacks next spring.

All this may prove to be totally wrong in the event. A White House official said that as painstaking an analysis as possible was completed before Mr. Nixon went on the air, but he admitted that such an analysis cannot guarantee that the end judgment is correct.

If wrong, the recourse of the public in any democracy is the ballot, and Mr. Nixon specifically called attention to this ultimate jury.

"In my campaign for the Presidency," he recalled, "I pledged an end to American involvement in this war. I am keeping that pledge. You should hold me accountable if I fail."

Strawbridge + Clothier

OVER ACHIEVER

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Young supertalent, the shirt that goes over everything. Sporty, dressy, day, night; tucked in or freed out. Out-silks silk for look and feel. But it's dunk-dry, never-iron triacetate crepe. By Alice Stuart in pink, lilac, natural or white, sizes 8 to 16. $13 Comes running when you call WA 2-4500. Blouses (384) Third. At all nine stores.

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