

opinion/editorial

Proposed increase in NU budget nice, but no dice

Budgeting is about as exciting as a rainy holiday.

However, because budget time is when many elected officials flex their political muscles, and because the NU budget is set every year by politicians, this newspaper would be amiss in its duties if it did not take a stand on the proposed budget for the 1980-81 fiscal year.

The NU budget is huge and, according to State Sen. Frank Lewis of Bellevue, "is buried in a maze of complexity."

Chancellors, vice presidents, the president, faculty members and vice chancellors meet and discuss programs and priorities. Priority requests are converted into dollar figures representing the estimated cost of programs.

The NU Board of Regents then reviews the request, makes its recommendations and approves a final

request that is sent to the Legislature.

This year, NU is requesting "not more than 15 percent" more state tax dollars than it got last year. Already, Regent Robert Simmons of Scottsbluff has apologized to senators in his district for "our fantasy request."

Simmons, and anyone else with any sense, is quick to realize that the Legislature, during an election year, is not going to give the NU system a 15 percent increase.

If, by some twist of fate contrary to the established pattern of legislative behavior, the Legislature would grant a 15 percent increase, Gov. Charles Thone would not.

Thone has sent a letter to the regents, saying he would like to meet with them about the request, which he considers "to high."

If NU administrators are realists, obviously the request is too high. If they are operating under the philosophy that says, "if you ask for 15 percent, you might get seven," they are playing dangerous games with a Legislature that does not appreciate "fantasy requests."

The Legislature and each of its members—particularly those up for re-election next year—are faced with the reality that voters want them to spend as little as possible.

It seems likely that the 15 percent request will anger senators who have sought greater control of the university since 1977, when the State Supreme Court ruled that the regents are the ultimate policy-making board for NU.

Yes, it would be nice if the university could get a 15 percent increase. It would be nice if NU could get a

big enough increase to bring faculty salaries up to par and bring tuition "down to par" with comparable schools.

It would be nice, but it won't happen. It is past time for NU administrators—and all of the regents—to realize this, and begin cooperating with the state, the governor and the Legislature to spend money efficiently.

Administrators will contend—with a certain amount of validity—that the quality of education and programs would suffer if the 15 percent increase is not granted.

That may be the case, but it is clear that administrators should plan on less than that, and should begin to make cuts now, to keep quality as high as possible with the money available.

—Randy Essex

Social status decides education for child

BOSTON—Now they've gone, carrying school lunches and school jitters. Soon they'll have settled into class, and memorized the hours and the corridors, the teachers' names and foibles.

But the children carry something else with them past the crossing guards and playgrounds today: a loaded bookbag of expectations. Their own, their parents', their society's.

ellen goodman

If there's a single message passed down from each generation of American parents to their children, it is a two-word line: Better Yourself. And if there's a temple of self-betterment in each town, it is the school. We have worshipped there for some time.

Most of our ancestors left countries where poverty, caste and class were inherited. They came to a country founded on the notion that they were born equal. So they lived, and we still live, not with the reality of an equal society but with the ideal of equal opportunity—especially for the children.

Americans have, in a sense, always laid their dreams on their children.

OUR CHILDREN'S chances have been invested in the schools since Horace Mann, denouncing visions of redistributing wealth, instead advocated free and universal education.

That notion has been behind reformist public policy—from the schools to the Head Start program to parent education.

But to a certain extent, the text has now been revised.

IT IS STILL true, according to Harvard's Christopher Jencks in "Who Gets Ahead?," that the best indicator of economic success—among men at least—is how much education a man has had. A college degree of any kind still makes a great difference.

It appears that, to a large extent, the status of the family determines the education of the child, which in turn determines his status.

"Most people, when they speak of school as an equalizer, mean that advantages obtained through schooling will cancel our socially inherited disadvantages as children become adults," writes another "revolutionist," Richard deLone, for the Carnegie Council on Children. But he notes that (1) education hasn't closed the gap between the rich and the poor and (2) only one man in five will



succeed in surpassing his father.

WHILE EDUCATION may be the best, or only, route out of poverty for the individual, on the whole status is inherited today in America not through the genes but through the class structure.

"... Schooling by itself cannot produce interclass or interracial equality," writes deLone. Even among the immigrant fables, the reality was that most families achieved some economic stability first and then insisted on their children's education.

The point isn't to denigrate school, but to gain perspective on the idea that each child starts with an equal chance and that education itself can solve inequality by lifting the next—always the next—generation out of poverty.

If we truly want to reduce poverty or inequality, we may have to start with parents—not kids and economics, not education.

"I don't think there has ever been any question that a society can narrow its social extremes if it wants to," says Jencks. "The question is one of political will."

Instead, we have thrown the issue of equal opportunity

onto the backs of our children, and that's a heavy burden to carry off in a school bag.

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Truth-in-testing bills are political hot air

WASHINGTON—There are a lot of things wrong with standardized testing as it is practiced in America.

But don't look to the so-called "truth-in-testing" legislation now pending in the House of Representatives to set any of it right.

william raspberry

One bill, introduced by Rep. Sam Gibbons (D-Fla.) is legislative cotton candy. It looks good and tastes good, but it is mostly air. Its provisions fall into two main categories: the unnecessary and the impossible.

In the first category are requirements that test administrators do what they already do: inform applicants of the general areas to be covered and, after testing, tell them how they did in each specific subject of aptitude area.

The second category includes a requirement that test-takers be told "the score which is generally required for admission to institutions of higher education." There really is no such animal, since most schools treat test scores as only one element to be weighed in admissions decisions.

Admissions officers at most reputable schools want to know a lot of things about applicants besides their test scores. How did they rank in their graduating classes?

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