

...technology and the heightened capabilities of America's trade competitors. The "strategy for national competition" that Askew advocates would give

against those who advocated shutting down public schools to block integration. Askew first won election to the state House in 1958, then moved up to the state Senate in 1962 by defeating a

sensitive land. "Government in the Sunshine" was a favorite Askew cause; he won passage of a constitutional amendment requiring the state's principal elected officials to make de-

... Thus, the federal matching monies he received at the outset of 1984 will go not to pay off loans, but to finance a media advertising blitz in states with early delegate selection events.

# The politics of educational reform

By Walter H. Capps

Perhaps it is due to the modulating influence of the city of Indianapolis itself. But I have the impression, after participating in the National forum on Excellence in Education last week, that priorities have shifted rather significantly in our society.

It wasn't simply that the talented Indiana high-school bands that were there to entertain offered a program dominated by the music of John Philip Sousa with sprinklings of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "America the Beautiful." It wasn't only that instantaneous and enthusiastic applause greeted virtually every mention of the need to bring God and prayer back into the classrooms. And it couldn't be attributed entirely to the fact that the plight of the nation's schools has demonstrably captured the attention of blue-ribbon commissions as well as large segments of the citizenry.

## Discipline restored

It felt much more like a change in worldview, as if there had been some proclamation that the era that began in about 1965 is now officially over. Then it was celebrated as "the great society." Today it is lamented as having bequeathed "the permissive society." But since it is over, the nation is free

Walter Capps is professor of religious studies at UC Santa Barbara, chairman of the California Council for the Humanities and president of the National Federation of State Humanities Councils.

to return to those tasks that defined its aspiration and demeanor before everything was enticed off course. Patriotism is in again, the Grenada invasion having served as antidote to the so-called "Vietnam paralysis." Good old-fashioned discipline has been restored too, forming renewed ties with perennial values and deep respect for institutional authority. Certainly there is some fear that questions of human rights and individual freedoms may have been jettisoned just as we were learning how to deal with them. And there is concern that former emphasis upon "educational access" and "equality of opportunity" will get lost in today's rush toward "excellence," but the "back to basics" movement is strong, and holds promise of being the counter-revolution that will halt the revolution many now condemn as having destroyed the national spirit.

## Craving for stability

Above all, the Indianapolis forum gave expression to the strong collective craving for stability. There is very little tolerance for any program or influence that might give the impres-

sion, as Jimmy Carter almost said, that the country is suffering "malaise." The people I met are angry that American technological expertise, in many respects, is inferior to that exhibited by the Japanese. It bothers them, more and more, that the Soviet Union turns out far more qualified engineers than we do, with an ability to produce military weaponry superior to ours. They see no reason why Americans should be accepting of the fact that test scores on college entrance exams are disappointing. Why should this deep slide into mediocrity be allowed to continue?

This was the agenda behind the agenda in Indianapolis last week. To be sure, the governors, mayors, state legislators, school officials, principals, teachers, students and other citizens present devoted attention to such important educational issues as core curricula, longer school days, teacher incentives, literacy and skills of commu-

nication, competence in math and science, and networks of assistance within the private sector. But the motivation is the disturbing evidence that in too many respects United States has lost the competitive edge it once could presume. Hence, the appropriateness of the title of the report "A Nation At Risk."

## Concerns restored

Secretary Bell and the Reagan administration deserve strong praise for helping restore educational concerns to the forefront of the nation's consciousness. Clearly, the need for revitalization is compelling. But in assisting the cause, the administration is also politicizing the issues (the rationale for improving education, for instance, being the same as the one that is offered for military spending). And the rich opportunity for educational reform is becoming more closely tied to an ideological sense-of-things upon which it is merely circumstantially dependent.

## OUR READERS' VIEWS

# Be proud that you are an American citizen

Editor, News-Press: While renovating a building on lower State Street I came across the following editorial.

... and not knowing from one minute to the next when we should be plunged into a holocaust of other people's making.

... town's feathers