

Governors get no respect

by Arnold Sawislak
United Press International
WASHINGTON — The National Governors Association demonstrated again last week why it is the Rodney Dangerfield of American politics.

The NGA, formerly called the National Governors Conference, has been in business since early in the 20th century, but until recently was regarded as a largely social organization. It held summer meetings at fancy resorts and on cruise ships to give governors a yearly break from the drudgery of the statehouses and an opportunity to talk a little shop with their peers between parties and golf games. It had little clout as an organization for several reasons. First, governors were unaccustomed to collective action. They were First Banana in their states and often didn't take to the idea of letting any organization speak for them. Second, there were few issues that they agreed upon enough to justify establishing a united front. Finally, the organization was really not geared for political action. There was an NGA staff, but it didn't have the professional expertise and political know-how to play in the big leagues.

The situation began changing when the idea of revenue sharing emerged. The governors found in it an issue they could unite on and a reason for devoting both time and resources to development of a strong Washington staff. They even were able to start working together as a group rather than as individuals. They got some results, too. Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter found the governors helpful in their struggles with Congress. But there was and still is a fatal flaw in the NGA's ability to present an effective political instrument. Years ago, to keep the organization from being used as a sounding board for the political party that had the most governorships, the NGA wrote rules requiring two-thirds majorities to approve the most routine policy statements and three-fourths votes to pass anything brought before their meetings without having been subjected to a lengthy committee process. This prevented anyone from sandbagging the minority, but it also made action hard to achieve. That's what happened last week. The NGA leadership wanted to use a little muscle in its long and frustrating negotiations with the White House over who

gets what in the "sorting out" of ment programs under New Federalism. So the leaders threatened to go to the White House and take their case directly to Congress instead of waiting for an agreement with President Reagan. This was a perfectly acceptable gambit; even if they didn't plan to go alone, it put pressure on Reagan to do business with them. The governors' move was also reported as a potential slap at the administration. To block it, the White House representative at the Oklahoma City meeting used the NGA's rules: He found the Republican governors unwilling to embarrass the president to endorse a separate New Federalism bill. So the leaders had to back off. To attempt to save face, they insisted the NGA would go ahead with development of a separate New Federalism bill, but agreed to drop the threat to take Congress without White House consent. But that is like designing a gun out of a firing pin, and the NGA is looking like poor old Rodney Dangerfield, the blustering buffoon who figures out why he "don't get no respect."

The meter reader cometh to get ye

Editor's note: Art Buchwald is recycling some of his best columns whilst he and his family soak up the sun and enjoy the soft sea breeze of the Falkland Islands, otherwise known as "Maggie's Vineyard."

by Art Buchwald

In all the fuss about the energy shortage, no one has mentioned the meter reader. When I say the meter reader, I mean the person who comes to your house to read your electric meter. For years, no one had paid any attention to him. He would ring your doorbell and yell, "Meter reader here to read your meter!" and you'd let him in and he would disappear, and when he returned, you'd shout at him rudely, "Shut the door when you leave!"

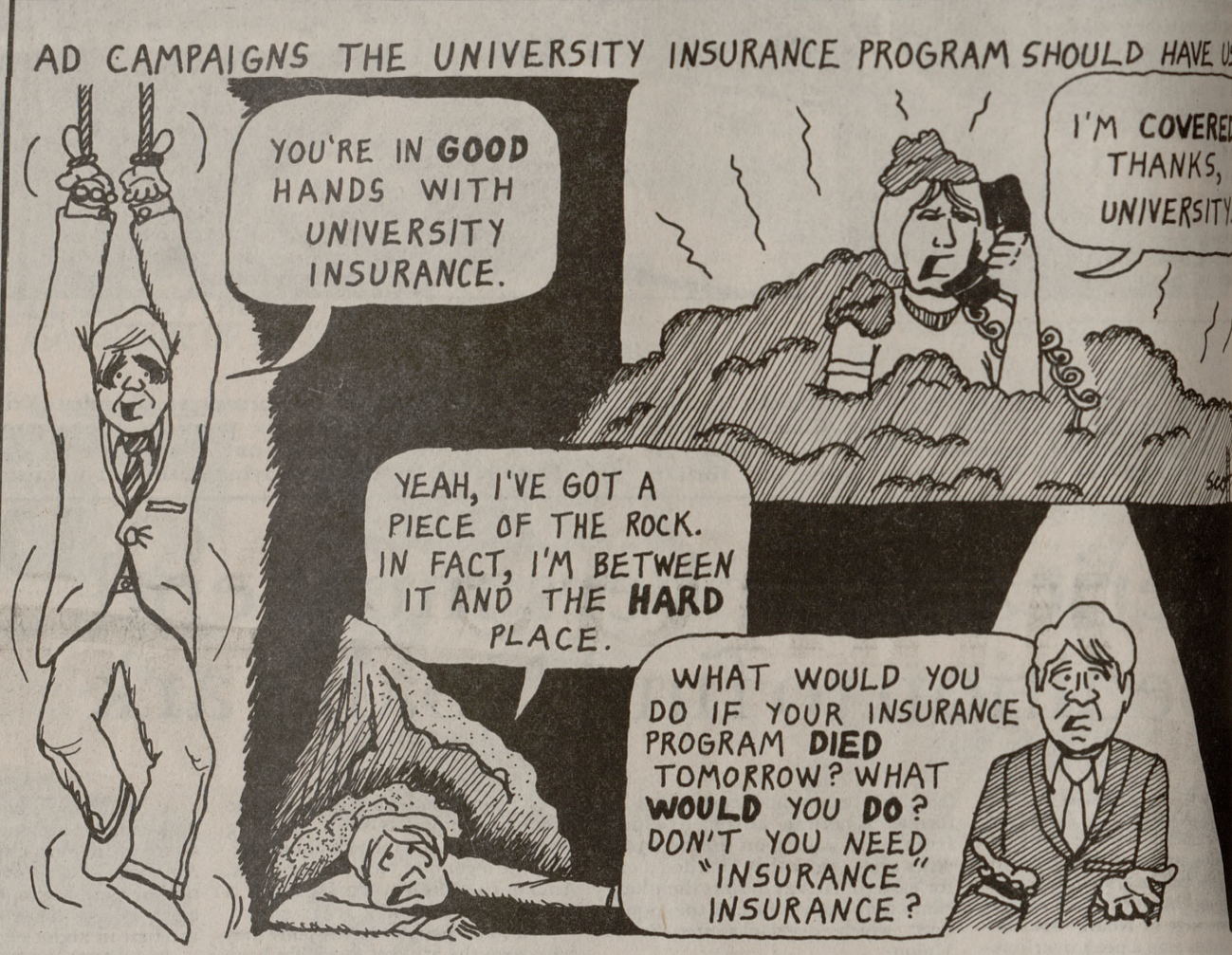
But now he has become the most important person in the lives of many of us. Just the other day, we were all eating dinner when the doorbell rang. My son answered the ring, and came into the dining room, his face white. "It's the meter reader. He wants to read our meter." My wife said, "How did he ever find us?"

"Be calm, everybody," I warned. "Pre- tend nothing has happened. Ask him to come into the dining room." The guy came into the dining room carrying his route book. "Where's the meter?" he asked. "Would you like to have dinner?" I asked.

"Nope. I've been offered dinner in every house I've been to today. I'm stuffed. Just tell me where your meter is and I'll be out of here." "You don't want to go into our basement," my wife said. "It's so messy. We'll tell you anything you want to know." "I have to check your meter," he said. "I checked it yesterday," I assured him. "It's working fine." "I have to read it." "I'll send my son to read it," I said. "He's great at reading meters. Here, have a glass of wine." "I'm sorry, but I have to read it myself. It will only take a minute." "Do you have a search warrant?" my wife asked. He looked surprised. "I don't need a

search warrant to read your meter." "I think you had better check the Constitution. You can't just barge into somebody's house and look at his electric meter," she said. "Well, if you feel that way, we'll just shut off your electricity," he replied. "It's all right, Mother. The man has not come to do us harm," I said. "I'm sure he won't take advantage of a family that is probably eating its last meal unless our food stamps come through." "Could you please direct me to your meter?" I took him to the cellar stairs. Then I said, "Be gentle with us. Be good to us." "Where have I heard that before?" the man asked. "Barbara Walters said it to President Carter on her show," I said. "Oh, yeah," he chuckled, and he went downstairs. The family all waited in the kitchen. "Why is he taking so long?" my wife asked nervously, as she twisted the dish towel. I put my arm around her. "It's all right, dear. The man is only doing his job."

"What kind of person would sneak into somebody's home and inform on them as to how much electricity they had used?" she said. "Hush, he'll hear you and add a couple of hundred kilowatts just for spite." "I can take him, Dad," my son said. "Let me use karate on him." "Will you all shut up! He's got us over a barrel. Electric meters never lie." The man came up whistling. "Give it to us straight," I said. "We can take it." "You used 1,500 kilowatts of electricity this month," he replied. My wife almost collapsed. I blanched. "Does the electric company have to know?" "Yup," he replied, writing on his route book. "I'll see you next month," he said cheerfully. My wife gazed at him. "I just pray your mother never finds out what you do for a living."



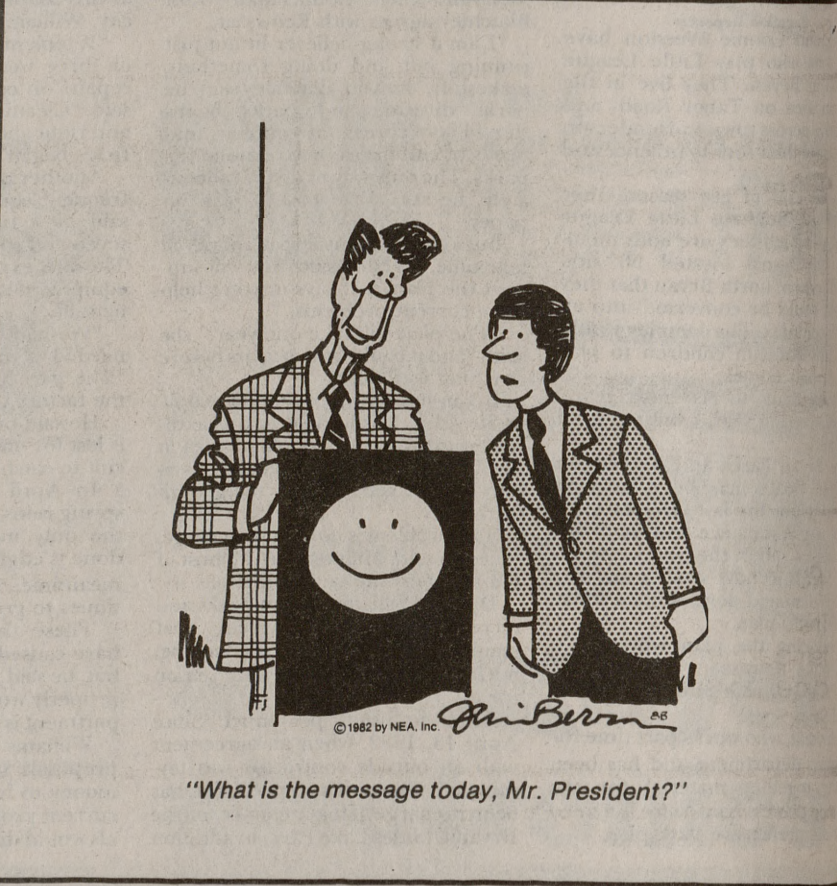
Letters: Loss of Estes deeply felt

Editor:
The recent death of Charles Estes, head of the Department of Architecture at Texas A&M, is a severe loss to the profession of architecture, as well as to his immediate family and friends. I had the good fortune to work with Charles Estes as a visiting professor at Texas A&M over a period of a year and a half and grew to admire his quiet competency in architecture, in teaching and in administration. After an extraordinarily successful career in Caudill, Rowlett and Scott, a major national firm, he came to Texas A&M dedicated to passing along his quiet, fully professional competency to young men and women. Architecture needs his kind of leadership and, with the death of Charles Estes, a leader of the first rank has been lost. I voice the feeling of architects across Texas and across the nation in acknowledging the contribution of Charles Estes and grieving at his untimely death. Fortunately, his influence at the University will doubtless remain for many years to come.

I am 36 years old, have brown hair and hazel-green eyes, stand 5'11", and weigh 200 pounds. My hobbies include reading, woodcrafting and writing poetry and essays. As an inmate laborer, I earn only a meager 50 cents a day, and couldn't even pay for this ad, and that is why I am asking you if you would please print this letter in your paper. Surely there must be

at least one person who cares enough to help me through this experience by printing it to me.
Thank you very much.
Clarence B. D.O.C. #111
Indiana State Prison
Michigan City, Indiana 46350

Berry's World



Editor:
I am writing you in the hopes that you will help me in my endeavor to find someone to write to. I am an inmate in the Indiana State Prison, and since I am from Pennsylvania and have no family or friends, my time here has been very lonely and isolated. Watching the other guys here receiving mail day after day, while I seldomly get any, sends me to the depths of despair at times. Even one letter would go a long way towards lifting me from these depths and making my life here more bearable.

The Battalion

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Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed, show the address and phone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (713) 845-2611.

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