

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

that the Social Security tax, which has increased 500 percent in the past 25 years, can continue to rise to provide ever greater benefits.)

In short, says Feldstein, "we are asking the next generation to pay an increased rate of tax to support us as retirees even as the whole social security program becomes less of a 'good deal' for them than it has been for us."

Feldstein proposes several measures—notably, increasing tax rates within three years—to deal with the system's more immediate problems. Since an unfair shift of the tax burden runs the risk that the next generation will simply refuse to pay, he also proposes that the current taxpayer generation, in effect, pay in advance. A 2 percent surcharge on Social Security taxes, says Feldstein, would produce about \$15 billion a year, enough to meet the needs of the demographic old-age bulge that lies ahead.

Does Sex Make a Difference?

"When Women Run Against Men" by R. Darcy and Sarah Slavin Schramm, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1977), Columbia University Press, 136 South Broadway, Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y. 10533.

When a woman runs against a man in a political contest, is her sex a help or a hindrance? Conventional wisdom is divided on the subject. Some analysts say women candidates gain public recognition more easily; others argue that women "mobilize" the votes of other women; still others believe qualified women are often victims of a sexist backlash. On one point, all agree: A candidate's sex interests voters.

But in a study of 1,099 contested races for seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (in 1970, 1972, and 1974), Darcy and Schramm, political scientists at George Washington University, conclude that voters are ultimately indifferent to a candidate's sex. When variables of party and incumbency are taken into account, sex alone was found to have no effect on outcomes in the 87 races in which women participated. Regardless of sex, Democrats were likely to get more votes than Republicans, and incumbents more than challengers. Two-thirds of the women were Democrats.

In each of the elections studied, there was no evidence that a candidate's sex contributed to greater public recognition; women shared obscurity with the men. Voting turnout of women in races involving women candidates was not significantly higher, and those few voters who would favor or oppose women candidates simply on account of their sex were "balanced neatly" by voters with opposing tendencies. But if sex is not an issue, why are there only 18 women in the 435-member House?

The answer, suggest the authors, lies in the nominating process. Women were nominated in less than 10 percent of the contests studied, and women of both parties tended to be nominated from

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

the "few, atypical, largely Democratic urban districts." Democratic women there can rely on such extra-party organizations as the Women's Political Caucus to support their nominations. Urban areas are also likely to have a larger pool of activist women as potential candidates. And the largest bloc of voters tends to be made up of "candidate-oblivious" Democrats who vote the party line instinctively.

As for Republican women, they tend to be nominated in the same kinds of districts, where chances of Republican victory are small. In such situations, ticket balancing—"introducing population subgroups not typically represented on the party ticket"—is irresistible. The result: Republican women are largely "throwaway" candidates.

An Idea Whose Time Is Past

"The Case Against a Federal Department of Education" by Gerald E. Sroufe, in *Phi Delta Kappan* (Apr. 1977), 8th and Union, Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

During the 1976 campaign, Jimmy Carter advocated creation of a federal, Cabinet-level Department of Education. The idea is not new. Cabinet rank for education, supporters contend, is necessary to "achieve rationality" in U.S. education policy by making it more amenable to "long-term planning, consolidation, and efficiency."

But creating a distinct education department, says Sroufe, director of instruction at Nova University, faces several obstacles—among them, high cost and the existing federal education bureaucracy. Reorganization is never quick, he notes. It took two years and two Presidents (Eisenhower and Kennedy) to restructure the Public Health Service, and four years and two Presidents (Kennedy and Johnson) to create the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Enormous amounts of presidential influence and energy must be brought to bear—to the detriment of other efforts. FDR spent seven years and exerted much influence enacting even a few administrative reform proposals; some were not adopted until the 1950s.

Proponents of a new department, the writer argues, also ignore the political realities that would make a Department of Education merely a symbolic affair. To lament the lack of a European-style ministry of education is to overlook the obvious: American education is peculiarly decentralized. Most responsibility rests with state and local governments. Special interest groups, e.g. vocational teachers, college presidents, inner city administrators, will fight to keep their programs from being consolidated or eliminated; numerous congressional committees dealing with education will still exert tremendous power, unimpressed by a Secretary of Education. And, within the department itself, unless more money and new policies accompany reorganization, each agency will single-mindedly respond to its narrow constituencies, as before. Let the idea rest in peace, Sroufe suggests, while Presidents and educators attend to more pressing matters.