

As I was saying...

Westbrook Pegler: consummate columnist

By JACK HILSHER

In the forties there was a columnist like none other... Westbrook Pegler was his name. He was syndicated - in 174 papers reaching almost ten million readers. His income was said to be more than the President's, at that time \$75,000. Columns were sold at a fee based on circulation. That meant a low of two dollars a week for a small country paper up to a hundred dollars weekly for a large city paper. Columnists took half of the fees while the rest went to the syndicate, who paid expenses. Pegler was well worth whatever he received, for in '42 the University of Wisconsin's School of Journalism polled newspapers on the question of who was the best columnist in the country and Pegler came in first. He was a supreme craftsman, writing superbly and so well that even his detractors admired his style. He could pack a ton of

venom into 600 words but it was always done with great flair. Pegler often spent an entire day on a single column and would hunt for 45 minutes to find the right word. A perfectionist, he was always displeased with what he wrote. Charles Fisher in "The Columnists" reported that when Pegler had pneumonia everyone worried. "But one day," a friend said, "He jumped out of bed and wrote two vicious columns attacking Eleanor Roosevelt. We knew then he was okay." Pegler always called Mrs. Roosevelt "La Boca Grande" and her President husband Franklin was "Old Moosejaw." His columns on both are models of invective, and Eleanor, herself a columnist with 87 papers, never understood why. "I thought he liked me," she said. When I first wrote about him this letter came to the editor: "As a former syndicated columnist, I read with interest Jack Hilsler's column on Westbrook Pegler. I

agree he was a craftsman. While a column is, in a sense, a feature article of opinions and observations, I have always thought it should stay within the bounds of decency. "Pegler sometimes overstepped such bounds, especially when he lapsed into ad hominem arguments, none of these flaws detracted from his craftsmanship. I look forward to reading more of Hilsler's columns." Did you have to look up "ad hominem?" Don't bother, I did. From the Latin, it means "appealing to one's prejudices rather than to reason," and/or "attacking an opponent's character rather than answering his argument." Either one aptly describes Pegler, who died in 1969 at 72. I always liked what a stranger wrote him: "You have been more of an influence on my life than I ever cared to express... much as I disagreed with you, I admired your splendid spirit." That says it all.

Library news

Entertainment book sale will benefit library

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library has available for sale the "Entertainment '94" book, the proceeds of which will benefit the library. The cost of the book is \$25, and it is packed with hundreds of discount offers from many of the best-known restaurants and merchants in your area. You can save 50% on almost everything—dining, travel, shopping, theatre, sports and more! The Entertainment card is welcomed at some of the best restaurants in town, with special second entrees 'on the house' benefits. The card is also the key to 50% savings at over 1500 hotels nationwide and is filled with thousands of dollars worth of 2 for 1 and 50% off coupons good for the entire family. The book may be purchased at the information desk in the library. This book would also make a nice gift for someone.

Nancy, Marilyn, Jennifer, Jane, Millie, Scott, Barbara, Tami and Ronald, extend best wishes to library patrons, friends and neighbors for a Happy New Year with good health, prosperity and peace. New books at the library: "Submarine" by Tom Clancy is a guided tour inside a nuclear warship. This story is a unique account of the nuclear-powered submarine, a vital component of naval power, to the public for the first time. The book explains the world of undersea warfare, from how people live within a steel tube for months at a time, to the many arrows a submarine puts in the quiver of national military powers. Many questions are answered. "The Shipping News" by E. Annie Proulx is a National Book Award winner and is a recent Book Club purchase at the library. Quoyale, a third-rate newspaper hack, with a head shaped like a greshaw, no neck, reddish

hair...features as bunched as kissed fingertips,' is wrenched violently out of his workaday life when his two-timing wife meets her just desserts. An aunt convinces Quoyale and his two emotionally disturbed daughters to return with her to the starkly beautiful coastal landscape of their ancestral home in Newfoundland. "Sweet Maple" by James M. Lawrence and Rux Martin, features the life, lore and recipes from the sugarbush. It is a beautifully illustrated and definitive guide to the sugar maple and maple sugaring, with perspectives on the natural history of the tree, the fascinating world of maple science and the memorable people who carry on a rite of spring almost as old as human culture in North America. The book is given to the library in honor of Elizabeth Patton on her birthday by Mazie Greenwald and Dr. Harold Bersoff.

The economic viewpoint

Clinton's health care plan in a nutshell

By HOWARD J. GROSSMAN

In a booklet recently published by the Clinton Administration titled "The Health Security Act: Benefits for Business", the Administration describes the Clinton health care package and the Health Security Act which would implement that package as preserving "our employer-based, privately-financed system of health care. It will control the costs that are hurting American businesses' ability to compete and it will help small business owners provide affordable insurance for themselves, their employees and their families". Is this a fair reflection of the proposal and the true impact on the small business community? The Administration states that "the Health Security Act will guarantee comprehensive health coverage for all Americans and legal residents, regardless of health or employment status. Health coverage will continue without interruption whether Americans change or lose their jobs, move, become ill or confront a family crisis. An employer's ability to afford premiums for all their employees is not dependent on the health status of a single employee." It is further stated that the Health Security Act builds "on our current employer-based system and asks all Americans and their employers to take responsibility for their health coverage. In return, they will have the security of knowing that they will always be covered." Noted further is that "the Act builds on our employer-based, privately finance system of health care. Employers and consumers will band together in large purchasing pools to strengthen bargaining power in the marketplace. Health providers will be forced to compete for business, leading to lower prices and improved quality. This will shift the power of the marketplace in favor of employers and their employees." The Clinton Administration proposal notes that "implementation will be managed at the local level by employers, employees and states. They make the claim that "this will create flexibility at the state level for employers and employees to design and control

the local health care system. An independent National Health Board acts as the Board of Directors for the health care system, setting national standards for comprehensive benefits, quality and cost." Employers would contribute 80% of the insurance premiums, calculated on the weighted average premium along health plans in their areas. Under the Act, employer contributions for insurance premiums are capped at 7.9% of payroll. The cost of providing health coverage "declines for most firms that currently provide insurance. Smaller businesses (those with fewer than 50 employees) with low wages will receive discounts of between 30% to 80% compared to what the average business pays". Employees pay the difference between the employer contribution and the premium of their chosen health plan. For example, the Administration suggests that a small firm with average wages of \$15,000 to \$18,000 would have a cap of contribution on percent of payroll of 5.3%. Those business with average wages of 0 to \$12,000 would have a cap of 3.5% as percent of payroll. Here are some of the advantages which the Administration claims for employers under the proposed plan: —Limits the amount of funds to be provided by employers in a regional alliance of no more than 7.9% of payroll. —Offers greater discounts (30% to 80%) to the smallest businesses and to low wage employees. —Increases the buying clout of small and medium sized companies. —Ends insurance abuse; no more occupational red lining, restrictions on pre-existing conditions, or discrimination against small businesses. —Allows larger employers to continue to manage their own health care insurance programs. —Reduces the burden of early retiree health care costs by supporting the employer's share of early retiree premiums. —Reduces the health care premiums for workers' compensation. —Increases consumer awareness of the cost and quality of health-care.

—Reduces the administrative burden on businesses by providing a single, comprehensive benefits package, eliminating the need for time-consuming annual review of benefits packages. —Consolidates reimbursement and claims submissions into a simple, easy to use format. —The Act injects fairness into the health care system, shifting power in the marketplace in favor of employers and their employees. Further advantages to the business community according to the Clinton Administration, among others, are the following: —The plan is phased in over a period of years. —Plan provides caps and discounts to hold down the cost of health insurance. —The plan calls for a significant percentage of the cost of insurance to be paid by the employee. —The plan enables the self-employed to deduct 100% of the cost of health care coverage from their taxes. —The plan removes all the abuses that are currently so rampant in the health insurance marketplace. —The plan controls the future rate of growth of health care costs. —Small businesses get rock-solid comprehensive coverage and a guarantee that they will never be in danger of losing insurance again. Whether or not this plan meets the needs of the small business community of Northeast Pennsylvania and the nation remains to be determined. Much dialogue will take place over the next several months and perhaps years prior to the time that a plan is enacted into law. Several proposals which differ from the Administration plan have been and will be introduced into Congress, and the debate will take shape. The small business community needs to study and evaluate its position with regard to the Administration plan and others which are surfacing. The information noted above derives from a booklet published by the US Small Business Administration, 409 3rd Street, SW, Washington, DC 20416. Additionally, questions and answers are included in the publication.

Skierski earns Meritorius Service Medal

Air Force Maj. Walter J. Skierski Jr., Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Tucson, Ariz., has been decorated with the Meritorious Service Medal, awarded for outstanding non-combat achievement for service to the United States. His wife, Carmela, is the daughter of Joseph Malacari of Reese St., Wilkes-Barre. Skierski is a 1976 graduate of Bishop O'Reilly High School, Kingston. He earned a doctorate from Temple University, Philadelphia in 1983.

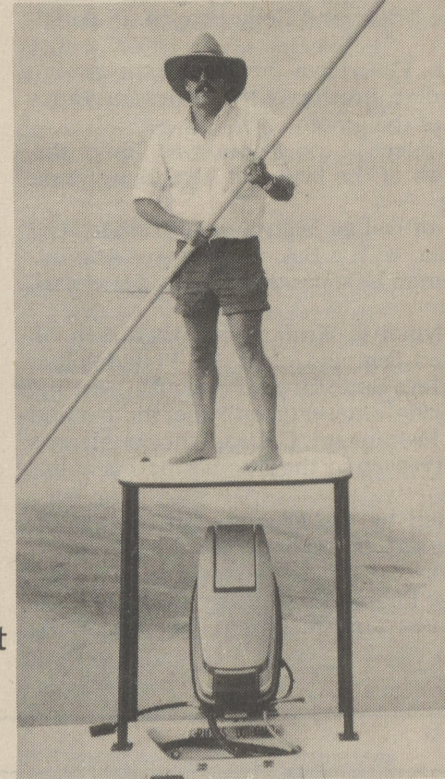
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