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## PROLOGUE

# When You Buy a \$5 Watch, You Get Your Money's Worth

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**T**here's a popular notion in this country that the customer is always right, that we get what we pay for and that elected officials respond to the will of the people. Therefore, if enough viewers protest the quality of television programming, that quality will improve. If you send off for a \$5 digital watch worth \$75, you will get a \$5 digital watch worth \$5. And if you want something accomplished in the legislature, you vote for the candidate pledged to get it done.

The problem is that in the first instance, we resist getting out of our recliners long enough to change the channel, much less to write a letter to the network. In the second case, we continue to believe in something for nothing, and in the third, we would rather complain than vote.

One year ago in this column and elsewhere, the pleas were being made to legislators to stand up and be counted for education, to preserve at least a part of the gains made during the state's years of oil-pumping prosperity. A number of them did so, enough to pass some bail-out revenue measures to keep state institutions in business until a longer term solution could be found. It wasn't all we asked, but probably as much as we could reasonably hope for at the time.

In fact, in voting for these emergency funds, several of education's supporters have made their fall reelection campaigns a lot tougher. Legislators who took to the floor to speak for the state's schools are being assailed by doctrinaire tax opponents, while legislators who kept their seats

are pointing with pride to their opposition — and still are claiming to be staunch supporters of education.

Just as many Oklahoma voters are veterans of the Oklahoma public schools, we assume that every reader of this magazine has a special interest in the University of Oklahoma, the vast majority having spent some time on its campus and in its classrooms. Unless the University of Oklahoma has failed completely, something must have rubbed off during those college years, if only the conviction that things could be better.

If those who have known and profited from the University of Oklahoma — or Oklahoma State or Central State or Northeastern A & M or any of the others — fail to speak up for candidates pledged to education, incumbents or challengers, then who can be counted on to back them? And who can criticize if they should falter in their dedication on down the line?

Support will not be needed for revenue increases alone. The sentiment for reform of the state system is building. When reform proposals are finally made, somebody is going to lose something, and local interests will be asked to give way to the overall good. But neither reform nor revenue stand a chance with legislators who stand to lose their jobs by virtue of their votes.

Someone in our family, who shall remain nameless, ordered one of those \$5 digital watches a couple of years ago. It looked all right and ran all right — for about two weeks. Maybe the reason old axioms hang around is because they are true.

— CJB