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Dems considering constitution overhaul

(First of four articles)
By TIM RICHARD
Officially they haven't made up their
minds.
But leaders of the Michigan Demo-
cratic Party give the strong impres-
sion they will support calling a new
constitutional convention when the
issue comes automatically before state
voters in 1978.

"If we see 10 or 12 major issues, it
would make more sense to go the con-
stitutional route," said Dudley W. Bu-
ffa, chairman of the party's Commission
on the Constitutional Convention.

"If we come up with only two or
three, it would be best to go the
amendment route."

THE PUBLIC will get a chance to
influence party leaders at a series of
public hearings in the metropolitan
area.

The Democratic commission will
hold one hearing at 7 p.m. Monday
(Sept. 26) in the Henry Ford Centen-
nial Library, 16301 Michigan, Dear-
born.

Another is set for 10 a.m. Tuesday
(Sept. 27) in Room 614 of the Veterans
Memorial Building on the Detroit riv-
erfront.

The party's big decision will be
made Oct. 29 when the Democratic
State Central Committee meets in
Grand Rapids.

The situation is a far cry from the
late 1950s and early '60s.

At that time, progressive Republi-
cans—led by the late Paul Bagwell
and a suddenly prominent auto com-
pany president named George Rom-
ney—led the fight for calling a con-
con. Voters approved their proposal,
and in a special election late in 1961,
the GOP won a 2-1 majority of con-con
delegate seats.

In 1963 voters approved the new

document by a scant few thousand
votes, with Detroit and the rural coun-
ties vainly opposing a constitution sup-
ported by the suburbs and outstate
cities.

THE BUFFA commission's prelimi-
nary report indicates about a dozen
areas Democrats would like to see
changed.

A major change would be to abolish
the eight-member State Board of Edu-
cation and replace it with an elected
department head.

"The public has no idea who is in
charge" of the eight-member board,
whose members are elected, two at a
time, over an eight-year period, the
commission contends. In practice, it
says, the superintendent really runs
public education and should be
directly accountable to the public.

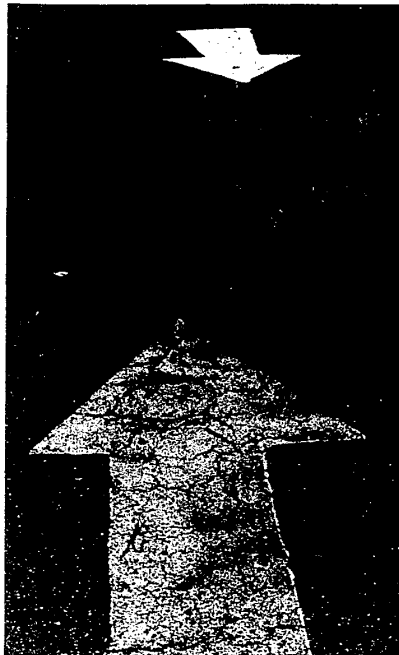
Another suggestion is to abolish the
property tax as the main source of
local education funding and replace it
with a graduated income tax.

Republicans can be expected to
point out that the state superintendent
used to be elected under the 1908 con-
stitution and that voters have twice
rejected graduated income tax propo-
sals in recent years.

AN ISSUE that split the commission
down the middle, Buffa said, is to
place a limit on the number of terms a
person may serve in the legislature.

"The argument against it is that we
shouldn't limit the right of the people
in a certain place to choose whom they
want to represent them," said Buffa.

"The argument for it is that it would
prevent the development of a class of
political careerists, and that it is the
only effective manner in which to
remove the power of government from
those whose claim to it is based solely
on the length of time they have had
it."



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