

Drop property tax for schools

Candidate offers another tax reform

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

State Sen. John R. Otterbacher (D-Grand Rapids), a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the United States Senate, last week outlined yet another tax reform proposal.

Bringing his "no frills" campaign to a meeting of the Livonia Optimist Club, he said he would favor scrapping the property tax as the primary method of financing public schools.

A tax limitation proposal championed by a group called Taxpayers United for Tax Limitation; a tax cut being sought by Shawassaw County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch and a group called Coalition for Property Tax Reform are trying to hold down government spending by limiting property tax revenues.

Otterbacher also proposed putting an eight-mill to 13-mill ceiling on local property taxes. These revenues, he

said, would be used to fund local government. Otterbacher's proposal resembles another plan being discussed at the state capitol. That plan would keep total tax payments the same, but would reduce property taxes and increase income taxes.

The public schools, dependent on property tax revenues, would thereafter be funded from the state's general fund. The lost revenue from the property taxes would be made up by increases in the state income tax and corporate taxes, Otterbacher said.

"THAT'S TAX reform—a shift away from an unfair tax to a tax that reflects an ability to pay," he said.

"The property tax is unfair. It doesn't reflect an ability to pay."

He called his alternative "more radical" than the Tisch Amendment which would cut property taxes in half and limit future increases in property

assessments to 2½ per cent a year.

"The Tisch Amendment would cut property taxes in half," Otterbacher said, "mine would nearly eliminate property taxes."

It is unlikely voters will get a chance to vote on his proposal, though. It is not being pushed by any organizations. It has neither the funding of the Taxpayers United tax limitation plan nor the volunteers and grass roots support of the Tisch Amendment.

In order to find its way to a place on the November ballot, Otterbacher's proposal would have to gain the support of two-thirds of both houses of the state legislature.

Otterbacher endorsed neither Tisch's proposal nor the more moderate tax limitation plan.

"I'm trying to find out what their effects would be the next time Michigan had a recession. What would it mean if it were 1974 revisited in 1980?"

"What does eight per cent unemployment for 18 months mean? Would it mean a curtailment in schools?" he asked.

His questions were aimed directly at



JOHN R. OTTERBACHER

Headlee's tax limitation proposal which would limit taxes to a percentage of the state's total personal income plus an allowance for inflation based on the cost of living index.

Tisch amendment to cut property taxes draws older, vocal supporters

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Former Vice President Spiro Agnew would call Robert Tisch's supporters part of the "Great American Silent Majority."

Metropolitan Detroit's share of the silent majority is beginning to make some noise.

Tisch, who is spearheading the drive to cut property taxes in half, is the general who leads a loosely organized grey-haired volunteer army. Supporters of the Shawassaw County Drain Commissioner's tax-cut plan seem to be older taxpayers with middle-income and working-class backgrounds.

Joining the chorus of the growing national tax revolt, they're complaining about ever-increasing property taxes and excessive waste in government.

"IT'S LIKE PAYING rent for your own home," said Nelson J. Hedger, a retiree from the city of Wayne.

"They've been assessing our home up every year," said Bernice E. Hedger. Twenty-five years ago they paid \$12,500 for their home. Today it is assessed at \$26,000, she said.

"We just want government to cut back on their foolish spending," she said. "In the schools we need more reading, arithmetic and writing; not carpeting, uniforms and \$65,000 administrators."

"I can see what's happening to people and their dreams of owning their own property," said Carlton Kissner, a retired school administrator for the Melvindale-North Allen Park school district. Kissner now lives in Brooklyn, Mich., but has been with Tisch since he began circulating petitions to put his tax cut amendment on the ballot.

"People are fighting not to be pushed off the economic map," Kissner said. For many senior citizens, he said, "it's a real tough job just finding the money" to pay their taxes.

"WE'VE BEEN WORKING harder in the past five years than at any other time," said Westland businesswoman Laura (Vicki) Wofford, "and we don't have a dime to show for it."

Mrs. Wofford and her husband, who operate the J. Wofford Company, an auction house in the City of Wayne, do not fit the description of the typical Tisch supporter.

She is relatively young. Her grey hair is stylishly coiffed. She is the most militant of the people who have named Tisch's headquarters on Michigan Avenue in the City of Wayne. Where Kissner's voice is calm, deliberate and soothing, hers is powerful and charged with emotion.

The 26-year-old business that she

and her husband operate has become Tisch's headquarters.

Since it opened its doors last week to those who want to sign petitions, a steady stream of Wayne County residents has trickled in.

Moreover, it has sent those who came to sign a petition back out into neighborhoods, shopping centers and theatre lobbies spreading the gospel of Tisch and hoping to recruit more disciples.

Tisch's troops "remind me of the little old ladies wearing tennis shoes who supported Barry Goldwater in '64," said one member of the Livonia Optimists Club last week.

While the volunteers seem to come from the same middle-income, senior citizen background, the hard-core staffers—those manning the phones at the Wayne headquarters and organizing petition efforts in Oakland and Macomb Counties—have come together from smaller organized groups of disgruntled taxpayers.

Kissner, for example, headed a statewide, non-profit organization called Michigan Citizens for Reasonable Taxation before joining Tisch.

Lillian Danna, a Warren City Councilwoman, headed a Macomb County group called CHAMIT, Citizens Revolt Against Massive Income Taxes.

"My husband is retired. He gets a pension of \$6,500. As a part-time councilwoman I get \$9,000. We planned and saved for many, many years to get this home. Now we can't afford the taxes," Mrs. Danna said.

She said she couldn't remember how much her annual property taxes were. "I'm such a busy woman I don't pay attention. I write the checks and that's it," she said.

Junk-a-thon in Royal Oak

Used wedding gowns and tuxedos, a hydroplane, religious comic books, a tree climbing harness, a cement mixer and scuba gear are just a few of the items that will be for sale at what is being billed as the world's second largest garage sale in Royal Oak Saturday and Sunday, July 22 and 23.

This is the third year that the city's chamber of commerce is running the event and the organization predicts more than 80,000 shoppers are expected. More than 250 stalls will be set up in the downtown Royal Oak parking structure on Third and Center by area merchants, private individuals, church groups and service clubs. Last year 235 exhibitors drew over 50,000 people to the garage sale.

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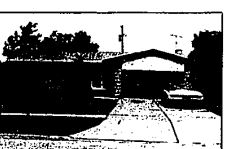
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