

# Constitutional update?

By TIM RICHARD

Not only did they disagree on whether Michigan needs a new constitutional convention—they couldn't agree on whether it was a partisan issue.

The issue was Proposal A—whether, after 14 years experience with the current constitution, Michigan voters should call a new "con con" on the Nov. 7 ballot.

The debaters were State Rep. Jack E. Kirksey (R-Livonia), who said no, and Dennis Stabenow, executive director of Citizens for a Constitutional Convention, who said yes.

"I STARTED the group myself with one other person in Lansing," Stabenow told a Schoolcraft College audience last week in a series sponsored by the college and the League of Women Voters.

Stabenow is a former member of the House Democratic staff in Lansing. In an interview, he said he was fired last May when his wife entered a Democratic primary against an incumbent Democrat (she later beat him).

Stabenow's group reads like a Who's Who of prominent Michigan Democrats—attorney Tom Downs and former U.S. Rep. Martha Griffiths, for example. But he said the group includes two persons who identify themselves as Republicans—George Gullen, former Wayne State University president, and John Jamrich, former president of Northern Michigan University.

Pointing to the 11 proposals on the ballot (one of which is "con con"), Stabenow said, "It's obvious people do want change—tax reform, education

reform, judicial reform. A 'con con' makes more sense than a crowded ballot."

What reforms did his group have in mind? Stabenow declined to say because "I don't think it serves our purpose." He said, "We want to focus our attention on the general principle of a 'con con.'"

KIRKSEY CALLED the effort behind Proposal A a Democratic movement. The last (1961-62) constitutional convention was Republican controlled by a 2-1 margin. "Democrats are anxious to get a constitution that matches their philosophy," he said.

Of 200 persons he had surveyed, the 35th District representative said, there was "a lackadaisical, unimpressed reaction" to the question of whether Michigan needs a new constitution.

If a convention is called, delegates would be elected within six months, "and all of the document becomes subject to change." Among the questions that could be raised, he said, are:

- Whether to allow a graduated rate income tax, voted down by the public as late as 1976.

- Whether to raise the sales tax, constitutionally pegged at four per cent on non-food and non-drug items.

- Whether to allow state and local governments to have deficit budgets, now prohibited.

- Whether to eliminate the procedure by which the public may petition for new law votes on new laws, referendums on laws enacted by the legislature and new constitutional amendments.

"Our constitution is extremely

new—only 14 years old—and only nine other state constitutions are younger. Only seven amendments have been adopted out of the 18 offered since 1964. And only four states have fewer amendments to their constitutions," Kirksey said.

PROPOSAL A was mandated by the present constitution itself, not by the legislature or a petition drive.

Michigan constitutions have traditionally called for a vote on a new constitutional convention every 16 years. Voters approved constitutions in 1837, 1850, 1908 and 1962 and rejected one in 1967.

If a convention were called by voters, the governor would set special primary and general elections, and 148 delegates would be elected—one from each of the 110 state house districts and one from each of the 38 senate districts. Each delegate would have an equal vote.

## Headleeite, Tisch versus Ferency at OU

Some of the biggest names in Michigan's debate over tax changes will be at Oakland University at 7:30 p.m. Friday in Varner Recital Hall.

Robert Tisch, Shiawassee County drain commissioner and promoter of Proposal 2 on the Nov. 7 ballot, will be opposed by Zoltan Ferency, Democratic gadfly of state politics. The Tisch amendment would cut local property assessments by half, allowing the state to substitute a one per cent rate increase in the income tax.

Mike Sessa will present the case for Proposal E, the Headlee amendment seeking tax limitation. Ferency, now a professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University, will again be the opponent.

It will be the last in a series of public forums sponsored by Repolittik, a nonpartisan political organization at OU.

Tonight at Schoolcraft College, the debates will be on Proposal D, to raise the drinking age to 21 by a constitutional amendment, and Proposal G, collective bargaining for state police troopers.

The debates will start at 7:30 p.m. in rooms 200-210 of the Liberal Arts building at the north end of the campus at 18600 Haggerty, Livonia.

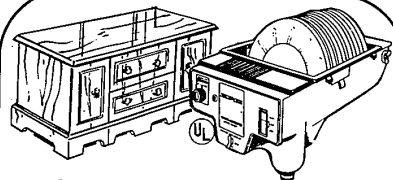


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