



Fig fever

Fig trees aren't supposed to grow in northern climates, but don't tell Eli Vergilio, shown here preparing his tree for another frigid winter. The Livonia backyard gardener bought the tree in Florida several years ago, and this year he plucked 100 figs from its branches. During the fall, Vergilio covers the tree with a plastic sheet and warms it with an electric light. During the winter he buries it under a protective pile of leaves. (Staff photo by Maurice Walker)

Reviving railroads is aim of proposal R

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the last in a series of articles on the Nov. 7 state ballot proposals. It was prepared by the League of Women Voters of Troy, a nonpartisan voter information group.)

PROPOSAL M

The issue: Should the state provide funds for a comprehensive transportation program and replace the State Highway Commission with a Transportation Commission?

Currently, all specific taxes imposed on motor vehicle fuel and vehicle registration must be used exclusively for highway purposes, according to the Michigan Constitution. Also provided for is a State Highway Commission of four members (no more than two from one party) appointed by the governor, and a State Highway Department whose director, appointed by the commission, must be a competent highway engineer.

The legislature put this proposal on the ballot because of demands for a more diversified transportation system including public transit. Proponents cite various reasons, including energy conservation and the physical and economical barriers to car ownership for some people, for these demands.

The amendment would provide that at least 90 per cent of motor vehicle and fuel taxes be used exclusively for general road taxes. Under this amendment, 10 per cent of the revenue could be used for comprehensive transportation purposes. Up to 25 per cent of sales tax on cars and parts would be used for comprehensive transportation purposes.

The amendment would limit bonding for roads, streets, bridges and other transportation purposes to amounts to be derived from specific motor vehicle tax and sales tax revenues. It would also replace the State Highway Commission with a State Transportation Commission. The commission would be enlarged to six members appointed by the governor (no more than three from one party) for three-year terms. The State Highway Department would become the Transportation Department, and the department director would no longer have to be a highway engineer or appointed by the commission. The latter change would allow appointment by the governor. The State Transportation Commission would then establish a state transportation policy.

The accompanying legislative package that raised motor fuel and registration taxes already passed. The Comprehensive Transportation Fund is to be used for local bus systems, rail programs, inter-city buses, and bridge, port and airport improvements.

PROPOSAL R

The issue: Should the constitution be amended to require the legislature to establish a Railroad Redevelopment Authority with power to issue general obligation bonds for making loans to railroads with tracks in Michigan for redevelopment projects?

Michigan law allows railroads to claim a credit against their property tax for 25 per cent of the yearly cost of maintaining and improving rights of way.

Recent federal regulations have removed the tax-exempt status from revenue bonds issued for maintenance and redevelopment purposes. The tax-exempt status is still accorded to general obligation bonds, but the state constitution must be amended in order for these bonds to benefit railroads.

Although railroads are generally acknowledged as energy-efficient transportation facilities, in recent years Michigan has been threatened with discontinuance of many miles of its rail lines. Upgrading of road beds and equipment is needed in many areas.

Proponents argue that the state must assist to keep rail lines operating or industrial and economic development will suffer. Opponents feel that the proposal shows favoritism to one industry when there are many other needy ones.

The joint resolution placed on the ballot by the legislature will require the legislature to provide by law for the creation of a railroad redevelopment authority and to prescribe its powers and duties.

The authority may issue general obligation bonds or notes not to exceed \$75 million at any period in redevelopment projects it considers to be in the national defense or to meet the present and future needs of state industries which use the railroads as the primary means of transporting their goods.

Unless a railroad defaulted on a loan made by the authority, there would be no cost to the state for these loans.

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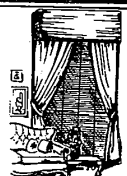
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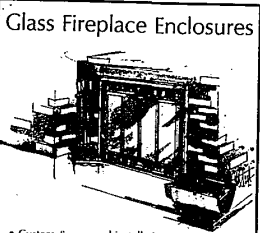
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56 program features governor candidates.

At 10:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 5, WTUV-TV, channel 56, will present an hour-long program with the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor, Gov. William J. Milliken and William Flanagan.

The interviews will be conducted by Capitol correspondent Tim Skubick, host of the weekly series "Off the Record." At 11:30 p.m. the same day, Democratic candidate Carl Levin will appear for a half-hour interview with

Tim Skubick. Republican candidate Sen. Robert Griffin declined an invitation to appear on the show.

The two Sunday night specials will wrap up the nine local election previews covering many of the major statewide offices and issues. Earlier that Sunday eve ending, the national series "Elections '78," at 8:00 p.m. will present a capsize round-up of important political contests in other states around the country.