

Tisch in the wings, ready to pounce

Feisty Robert Tisch is a cagey curmudgeon. Labeled a "tax-slashing radical" by his opponents, the Shiawassee drain commissioner has been playing it cool.

We were beginning to think the rough-edged commissioner had climbed into the woodwork or was waiting in the wings — bad mouthing Gov. Milliken's tax shift plan under his breath.

But we should have known better. Low key just isn't the Tisch style. The declared tax-cutter popped up in Brighton April 30 to address a 100 Realty World broker/owners meeting.

The drift of his opening remarks was, "I don't believe any citizen in the entire state of Michigan is going to spend one damn penny in opposition to Milliken's tax shift and massive tax increase called Proposal A."

That's the subtle Tisch style we all know and some taxpayers love.

The commissioner went on to say that state government has already spent millions of our tax dollars advocating the May 19 special election for Proposal A.

HE PROCEEDED to call the proposal a "radical shift from one pocket to the other that will continue the economic disaster Michigan is in."

Pretty cagey, that word "radical." What do they say about the pot calling the kettle black? Or how about sour grapes?

Cool hand Tisch is nobody's fool, and he's playing it every way but loose. He's not going to raise or spend a cent to try to knock Proposal A out of the box, says he.

What's more, he vows, there won't be any special



Jackie Klein

interest committees rapping the tax shift and no TV ads countering the "deception Milliken is spreading by falsely calling Proposal A "tax relief."

Furthermore, says the crusty commissioner, there'll be no speakers' bureau to debate Milliken's circle of friends who may benefit from Proposal A.

Among those friends, Tisch says, are law and accounting firms, financial institutions, some businesses and unions and 162,000 state employees who allegedly are getting a 9-percent pay hike.

"WE'RE GOING to devote what few nickels and dimes are still left with the good citizens of Michigan to the petition drive and campaign for the 1982 Tisch Tax Cut Proposal," humorously says the would-be man of the people.

"We're planning a massive volunteer citizen campaign to correct the state constitution to how Mich-



Bob Tisch, 'tax man'

igan people want to be taxed. Our dunces in Lansing connected Proposal A and called it 'tax relief.' It isn't."

Tisch promises to be personally available on a volunteer basis to express his opinions on Proposal A "when it doesn't interfere with my duties as Shiawassee County Drain Commissioner."

If you're inclined to call Tisch, don't ask anyone at city hall for his phone number or address. The commissioner is persona non grata in local government circles.

Though Tisch may be considered a pair of brown shoes in a world of tuxedos, he's a force to be reckoned with. Milliken followers claim Tisch's tax-cut proposal could cripple the state.

POLITICOS ARE betting if the tax shift flunks May 19, a lot of voters will move into the Tisch-support group, likely assuring Tisch III will pass in 1982.

But the modest Tisch insists his plan would pass if it were on the May 19 ballot.

"Michigan has the worst rating in almost every category, and citizens are frustrated and disgusted with politicians," the outspoken tax-cutter says.

"If Proposal A passes, it will temporarily confuse the people. But if anyone is still living in Michigan, they'll vote next time with a vengeance for the most severe Tisch proposal ever put before them."

Tisch may be a scratchy thorn in the sides of government officials. He may be a savior to folks who grieve for the plunking down hard earned dough for higher and higher property taxes.

But saint or sinner, Tisch has a hefty share of chutzpah. That nobody can deny.



Leonard Poger

Repeat that in English — please

I'm getting a bit tired of the bureaucratic attack on the English language when it comes to explaining simple actions.

A recent example that repeats itself at numerous school board meetings concerns the recommended "consolidations" of school buildings.

What school administrators and board members really mean is that one school will be closed as a public school and its students transferred to another building.

Consolidation? Hell, they are closing a school that, in most cases, has been open for more than 20 years.

Why can't they call it a closing? Another good example is in city halls, where mayors, city managers and council members are going through proposed budgets.

They are a lot of talk about using "resources." What they really mean, in most cases, is money.

'Dead band' has nothing to do with musical groups. It is a 'specific range of values in which the incoming signal can be altered, without changing the outgoing response.'

Another favorite term is "local revenues." In reality, 98 percent of local revenues is property taxes. So why don't we call it property taxes?

Admittedly, there are other local revenues such as building permit fees, recreation program fees and charges, to name a few.

But homeowners don't complain about swimming pool fees; they cry about their rising property taxes.

WHAT BROUGHT out the frustration of trying to keep up with public officials who don't say what they mean for fear of offending someone is a delightful new paperback book, "Doublespeak Dictionary."

It is a humorous and witty collection of nouns, verbs and phrases collected from numerous public and institutional sources over the years.

For example, author William Lambdin describes a "police action" as "defined as a 'conflict' in Korea and an 'era' in Vietnam, but never as a war."

Another good one is "state research unit." It is defined as secret police, commonly used by former Ugandan dictator Idi Amin.

Some of my favorite people are school district business managers and finance directors. They are forced to use a lot of technical words and phrases because of their profession.

But a few years ago, one suburban finance man used some new phrases in what he used to call in simpler terms a "budget review."

COMPUTER PEOPLE are funny people to work with at times.

They assume that non-technicians know as much about the computer language as they do. Sometimes they get into trouble because they use a technical word or phrase that means something else to someone outside the computer world.

Two good examples are "dead band" and "decade."

"Dead band" has nothing to do with musical groups. It is a "specific range of values in which the incoming signal can be altered, without changing the outgoing response."

"Decade" has nothing to do with counting numbers of years. But it is close. In computer talk, it means a group or assembly of 10 units.

PERSONNEL administrators also have a unique language of their own. At a suburban hospital, a visitor in the personnel manager's office saw an employee's file cover stamped in large letters: "TERMINATED."

The visitor asked which employee died. The answer was that no one died. The employee was merely no longer working for the hospital.

A few years, a city attorney used a similar phrase, to describe how a police officer involved in a brutality dispute was "terminated from the payroll."

The attorney didn't bother to clarify that immediately to indicate whether the officer was fired, resigned on his own, or was just on a leave until the dispute was over.

But there is a bright spot. A suburban city council is advertising for private companies to collect — not "refuse" — but real live garbage, rubbish and trash.

Buy a poppy; remember a veteran

Selling a veteran's poppy isn't like selling a box of Girl Scout cookies.

When you plunk down your coins for the scouts, you're making a bet on the future of some nice young girls. You're opening up vistas to give them a better handle on life.

Come this weekend, when you buy a veteran-made red paper flower, the traditional poppy, you'll be commemorating sacrifices of the past and repaying a debt.

You can't really put price tag on serving our country in time of war.

After all, the result may be some raucous war stories told and retold over the years and a sigh over the adventures of the past.

But it may also be the loss of a limb or limbs, an eye or the mental vigor of a person that started out in full health and paid dearly for his or her service.

Most of us don't really even reflect that there are veteran's hospitals nearby housing men and women who served in the "War to End Wars" or World War II as well as the so-called "conflicts" or in Korea and Vietnam.

Most of the Vietnam vets aren't card-carrying American Legionnaires or affiliated VFWers, or



Shirlee Iden

what have you. Feeling alienated, neglected and victimized, they have largely ignored organized veteranism except to protest occasionally.

YET ORGANIZED veteranism has not ignored them. And that's why there's a poppy sale beginning Thursday, May 14, and continuing for several days.

It's not a new idea the selling of the red paper flowers to benefit hospitalized veterans. The first ones were sold in 1921 by the Veterans of Foreign Wars to raise money for French war orphans.

These days, every organized veteran's group joins in the sale. So on the streets this week, you'll see VFW, Catholic War Veterans, Polish War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, American Legion members and their auxiliaries with cap on head, canister and poppies in hand.

These same poppy sellers are part of a steadfast group who know very well the road to the Allen Park Veteran's Hospital, the Ann Arbor facility, and the Battle Creek Hospital, too.

MOST WOULD tell you the best gift is the knowledge that those hospital visitors will be back to talk and to listen. And yes, to understand the dreary sentence of those who didn't return whole from defending our country.

"I've been selling poppies for more than 30 years, and I haven't a cent to show for it," said Bill Greenberg, commander of Michigan's Jewish War Veterans.

He'll be out there with a host of others selling the red flowers made by hand by Michigan's hospitalized veterans. For many of those veterans, the few cents they earn for fashioning the poppies is their only income.

Maybe you never visited a VA hospital, and maybe you never will. But the men and women in them are there because they fought for every one of us.

Whatever veteran group's poppy you buy, you can be sure the service will be offered to all veterans.

You can't eat a poppy, but you can wear it with pride.

Handicapped to suffer most from budget ax

Now you see it, now you don't. Watch closely, because within the next two or three years, Michigan and other states will slowly slide backward into the 19th century.

The first steps already have been taken by local governments. The second will result from the Reagan budget, and the third will follow in a sleight-of-hand by the state of Michigan if Proposal A passes on May 19.

And in 1985, we will discover that public education in the state is in utter turmoil and that we really aren't doing anything to educate handicapped students.

RIGHT NOW, school boards throughout the state are waiting with bated breath to understand any special education program they can and dump handicapped students into general classrooms as fast as possible.

The Reagan budget, with its abandonment of the block grant form of financing, will escalate the abandonment, and Michigan will follow form if voters approve Proposal A.

And local school boards, with an air of innocence, will throw up their hands in despair. They will piously disclaim that nothing can be done as more and more handicapped students are forced into educational environments that will close the doors to any chance for learning.

Future historians will want first to look at the warm-sounding buzz word educators use today: "mainstreaming." In brief, mainstreaming is taking a handicapped child who has been in a special education classroom and transferring him/her to a general education classroom.

There are many high-sounding educational theories on the advantages of mainstreaming that I won't waste your time reciting. The stark reality is that mainstreaming has become popular for only one reason — the movement saves money for school boards that are tight with the bucks.

The real problem is that school boards and administrators do not spend the few extra dollars needed to make mainstreaming work. Instead, they insist that handicapped children be treated as if they were not handicapped.

So mainstreaming fails because reality does not match with the hopes of the policy makers, who are blinded by dollar signs.

JUST RECENTLY, state law was changed so that social workers no longer are required by law to be available for handicapped students.

Like rats deserting a sinking ship, school boards throughout the county have laid off social workers — merely because the state requirement has been lifted.

Daniels' den by Emory Daniels

In this instance, the motivating force is not only financial but also political. Social workers primarily spend their time identifying students who require help and advising what help ought to be given.

The problem for social workers is that by identifying students who need help, they are really producing future costs that school boards and administrators don't want to face up to.

It is much cheaper to allow a student to fail than to give him/her a chance to succeed.

The other problem is that the social workers' clients have not yet been certified as handicapped, and so they do not have a group of concerned parents watching out for their welfare.

Politically, the clients of social workers lack clout because they don't have any lobbyists.

INSTEAD OF FINANCING specified educational projects, such as aid to the handicapped or transportation, President Reagan's budget dode out all the money without any accountability.

The new appropriations process is almost invisible, and it will be difficult to trace what is happening from one year to another.

Among those who will be hurt are handicapped students, through reduction in special education financing, and low-income students, through reductions in school lunch programs. Senior citizens and poor families will be hurt as less money is spent to help them.

The state already is talking about following that lead by eliminating aid for all specific programs.

Proposal A guarantees only to reimburse local school districts for the reduction in property taxes. It makes absolutely no assurances about aid for specific programs.

And so Michigan, the handwriting is on the wall as sure as if the hand of God burned in the letters.

If Proposal A is approved, the state will greatly reduce the amount of money it now returns to local districts for learning programs for handicapped students.

AND LOCAL districts will drop programs for the handicapped left and right, all the while blaming the state for its reduced aid.

Right now, however, school boards are complain-

ing bitterly about money being spent on handicapped students because of state-required programs that aren't fully reimbursed.

The cry is so shrill that the listener easily can understand how quick the commitment to educate the handicapped will be dropped when it's possible to do so.

And when that happens, education will fall back to a standard of 20-30 years ago, when handicapped students either had to compete with normal children in the general classroom, learn in expensive private schools, or be put in institutions because of what educators like to call "socially undesirable behavior."

School trustees and administrators will philosophically proclaim their obligations to educate all students according to their needs. But when it comes to special education programs — and handicapped students — school leaders resent spending more money on handicapped students than they spend on average students.

THE REALITY is that all state requirements can be dropped, every single dollar from state and federal sources eliminated, and the handicapped student would still be alive and well living in the local district.

The local district will then would have an obligation to educate that child without any help from state or federal governments.

And it should be apparent to anyone that it takes more effort and money to teach a blind child than to teach a youngster with 20-20 vision.

But that is not apparent to local trustees and administrators. School boards would rather mainstream them away, under the mistaken assumption that the problem somehow will go away.

Yet whether the student is mainstreamed or not, whether the student is certified or not, whether the district is reimbursed or not, the handicap remains, and the obligation to educate is just as real tomorrow as it is today.

In that tomorrow, local school districts will be in serious financial difficulty because they allowed the state and federal governments to wiggle out of their obligations to pay for learning programs for the handicapped.

But for now, school boards are blinded by the dollar that isn't there. They can't see the student who is there — in need of help.

You can zip up the pocketbook, but the child will still be there. Ready or not, the obligation must be accepted.

May 19 is one milestone. But others have been passed in recent years, and others lie ahead.

We must decide how public education really is.