

The governor's race

Candidates point fingers at welfare and business tax

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Michigan ranks 51st among states getting back the federal tax dollars they pump into Washington and several gubernatorial candidates say they know the way to change that.

"We're number 51 if you count the District of Columbia," said former state Sen. William Fitzgerald, a Democratic candidate.

"In order to get our fair share, we have to play heavy politics. We need a governor who will put together a mid-western coalition to put some heavy political pressure on Washington," said Fitzgerald, the 1978 Democratic nominee.

He and other candidates to succeed Gov. William G. Milliken spoke last week at a luncheon of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

REPUBLICAN contender L. Brooks Patterson disagreed.

"I don't want to beg from Washington. I want to pay less to the feds," said the Oakland County prosecutor.

Patterson's GOP rival, insurance executive Richard Headlee of Farmington Hills, said the only way to get more is to be competitive with surrounding states.

"When we compete with the rest of the world (in business), then we'll get help (from Washington)," he said.

Fitzgerald, Patterson and Headlee were joined by property tax proponent Robert Tisch, an independent, at the chamber forum. However, after Tisch urged members to participate in petition drives, he bowed out and yielded the floor to candidates who had "opposition in the Aug. 10 primary."

THE CANDIDATES agreed that the erosion of Michigan's economic base is

the primary campaign issue.

All contended that because of numerous taxes on small businesses, the state has made itself an unfavorable place in which to do business.

All pointed accusing fingers at unemployment compensation, workers compensation and welfare fraud as targets of wasteful tax dollar spending.

"I've been to Lansing, and I've seen the regulatory climate work against us. We pay way too many benefits," Fitzgerald said. "We shouldn't pay benefits to people who voluntarily leave their jobs."

HEADLEE SAID he admired a Pennsylvania law that called for all able-bodied men between ages 18-45 to be pulled off welfare rolls.

"We can't allow people to continue to be kept on welfare rolls. In 1969, one out of 36 persons was on welfare. In 1981 it was one out of eight," Headlee said.

"We have to change welfare to welfare. No one should receive money from the government without work. Let them (recipients) pick up pop bottles or something," he said.

Headlee's comments won him a round of applause.

BUT FITZGERALD argued there would be a huge cost to taxpayers for driving "welfare workers" from site to site, supervising them and insuring them against accidents.

Patterson called for repeal of the single business tax to induce companies to stay in Michigan, as well as reorganizing the state's welfare department.

"In 1973 I wrote a book about how to cut down on welfare fraud. I sent it to every legislator, but none of them replied. The only way to get them to listen to me is to be on the inside — as the governor," he said.

Group wants to drop county executive

A group of Oakland County residents calling themselves Political Office Watchers (POW) is launching a petition drive to abolish the county executive post.

POW, headed by Lillian Richards, the Orchard Lake Fire Commissioner, calls itself a bi-partisan group that began this year. She said 53 persons attended its first meeting Monday. Next meeting is 7 p.m. July 12 in the county board auditorium.

Richards said the group believes there is waste in the county executive's office and that the three-member board of auditors should be restored in place of the executive.

Other POW officers include vice-president Billie Crowley, Clarkson; secretary Mona Spreen, wife of Sheriff Johannes Spreen, Farmington Hills; and treasurer Bernice Ferguson, Pontiac.

Richards said only "two or three" sheriff's department employees attended the meeting.

DEPUTY COUNTY Executive Pat Nowak called the group petty.

"It's obvious that a small group of two to three people who are highly partisan are masquerading as a citizens type group trying to do something (abolishing the exec post) when the voters have

voted in the system and it has received rave reviews from the media and citizens as well," he said.

"It's unfortunate that a petty little band of people have nothing better to do," added Nowak.

POW representatives regularly attend county commission meetings.

They are asking the board today to vote by a two-thirds majority to abolish the county executive post. If that fails, they will try to collect 45,000 signatures on petitions to have the question placed on the ballot.



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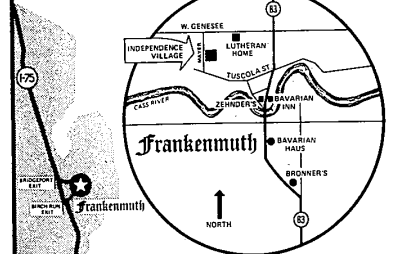


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