

Will president honor vets?

An open letter to President Ronald Reagan: On Saturday next, tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans will gather in this nation's capital to remember and, in a way, finally be welcomed home by their countrymen.

As with everything related to Vietnam, the preparation of this homecoming has been a controversial task. For years many of us thought a monument to the Vietnam veterans in Washington would be appropriate. Despite the fact that this country chose to lose the Vietnam War, the last persons to be blamed should be those who did the fighting.

We did our best in the face of overwhelming roadblocks put up by the politicians and the anti-war activists. Strangely, it is those groups which have escaped scrutiny and disgrace and, in fact, have in some instances been made out to be heroes of that conflict.

BUT ON Saturday a memorial, the design of which is still hotly debated, will be dedicated. It commemorates those 50,000 plus who died for their country's futile effort.

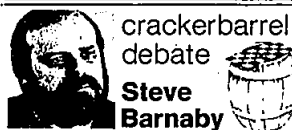
The occasion is an historic one — the last time that this many veterans of that conflict will be gathered in one place. For the first and last time the streets of Washington will be filled with Vietnam veterans rather than anti-Vietnam War protesters.

From the lack of national media interest so far, most of us are betting the coverage of this historic occasion will be given far less television time or print space than any anti-war demonstration.

We can live with that, Mr. President. We're used to it.

BUT WHAT we're having a hard time understanding is why you have refused an invitation to be with us. A call to the White House reveals you will be preoccupied with personal business on that day. Interestingly, not only you, but everyone else at the White House will be too busy that day to attend our national homecoming.

Personal business, you say? Too busy? Nothing



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

could be more personal on that Saturday than to stand with the 50,000 families who sacrificed their children. The commander-in-chief should never be too busy to stand with these many thousands of veterans who will gather only this once.

It's about time that a president of this country sacrifices a little personal time to stand by us.

But you have carried on the tradition of presidents before you by deserting us on the battlefield, so to speak. Not only have you refused to come to the Vietnam Memorial dedication, you have refused to send Vice President George Bush or any other White House emissary.

INSTEAD, YOU send a Veterans Administration lackey even though it is well known that most Vietnam veterans have nothing but contempt for the VA.

Those of us coming to Washington on Saturday aren't a political lobby group asking for anything. Indeed, many of us disagree among ourselves about the Vietnam War. But the war is over. You really don't have anything political to risk by showing up.

True, this message is being transmitted to you through a small weekly newspaper in the heartland of America. Traditionally we leave presidential appeals to the New York Times and Washington Post. But they, too, seem to care little about this issue.

But don't be deceived, Mr. President. Many of us feel the hurt of once again having a president turn his back on us. There still is time to change your mind. Dare to be different. Join us this Saturday.

Winners face big issues

THE ISSUES of any election campaign, someone once said, are the issues of May and June. When the winners take office in January, they are likely to face a new set of issues they never debated.

In 1983 the Michigan Legislature and governor will have to tackle the issue of roads. Our freeways already are a generation old, for the most part, and need resurfacing. Many bridges across the state have been targeted as needing rebuilding. Lots of county roads consist of patches on top of other patches.

Outgoing Gov. William G. Milliken, bless his forward-looking heart, wanted to face the issue. Last March, when he proposed an income tax increase, he wanted to earmark part of that money for roads.

He was shot down — for two reasons, it appears. First, the Legislature wanted to hold down the size and duration of a tax increase, fearing the wrath of the voters. Second, the road lobby didn't want to be financed out of the general fund because in later years it would have to butt head-to-head with mental health, education and all those good things for general fund tax money.

SO THE CAMPAIGN issue became, in James Blanchard's words, "jobs, jobs and jobs." It was tough stalling to get the candidates to discuss the deplorable condition of our roads.

Richard Headlee said he had driven around the state and thought the roads were all right. Headlee proposed to see an inefficient Michigan Department of Transportation fat with engineers doing nothing, and he took a cheap shot at the Zilwaukee Bridge failure.

Headlee did realize, however, that revenues were down, though he declined to advocate tax-rate increases to restore them to their normal levels.

Blanchard saw no need for new road construction — just repairs. Actually, our state and county road programs have been reduced to that level already. Blanchard was taking the easy way out by advocating the status quo.

WELL, THE ELECTION is over, ladies and gents, and the survivors still must face the issue.

Back in the 1960s, Michigan was wise enough to dis-



Tim Richard

continue the practice of "earmarking" certain taxes for education, but we continued the bad habit for roads. The results: When gasoline and weight taxes are high, our road funds are overflowing; when those taxes are down, as they are now, we run short of road money.

For those who tuned into this issue late, here is the situation: Our fuel-efficient cars are burning much less gasoline, which is taxed on a per-gallon basis. Our vehicles are lighter, so our weight taxes are similarly down.

Total mileage also is down, though only a trifle, due to the depression.

IT'S FASHIONABLE to complain about high taxes, but the truth is that our road tax fund is something like 20 percent smaller than three or four years ago.

All sorts of options are available. The Legislature could simply raise the rates on gasoline and weight taxes. It could dip into the state general fund to beef up the road fund. It could make the gasoline tax ad valorem (that is, a percentage of the total price) rather than a specific number of cents per gallon.

Here's a good question: If our vehicles are so much lighter, why are our roads breaking up so badly? One possible answer: Sure, cars are lighter, but Michigan has the heaviest truck weights in the Union. We may need to consider either a) reducing weight limits or, more likely, b) much higher weight taxes on those 11-axis monsters.

The winners will have to realize they can't fast-talk their ways around this question, the way they did in Leagues of Women Voters debates. Our roads need work, and that work will cost money.

Politics has its human side, too

Election 1982 is yesterday's news, and the political analysts, praise be, have finally stopped analyzing the races, winners, losers and each other.

Defeated candidates probably aren't philosophizing about how it's not whether you win or lose but how you play the campaign game.

There is, however, a human side to the harried, frantic, arduous, hard-nosed, keep smiling, side-by-side pounding game of politicking. And that human element supersedes both victory and defeat.

Being a good loser is the easy part. But Congressman-elect Sander Levin's victory party Tuesday in his Redford campaign headquarters reflected a lot more than winning.

The celebration captured an emotional, lump-in-the-throat feeling supplied in large warm doses by the close Levin family. Suspense surely didn't fill the air as supporters cheered and applauded long before the final votes were counted.

BEING a good loser is the hard part. And over at the Southfield campaign headquarters of Gerald Rosen — Levin's Republican opponent for a congressional seat in the 17th District — the mood was glum.

Rosen's wife, Liz, couldn't hold back tears of disappointment. She was an integral part of her husband's campaign and it was a good,

clean uphill fight. Supporters were miffed at Levin's early declaration of victory but Rosen took his loss on the chin.

There may be magic in the Levin name. But the real treasure lies within the family standing behind "Sandy," win or lose.

U.S. Sen. Carl Levin proudly shared in his brother's triumph Tuesday night along with his wife, Barbara, sister Hannah, Levin Gladstone and their 83-year-old mother, Bess Levin.

"Carl is the junior member of the family," Levin said. "But he's senior in so many ways in terms of effectiveness in this country."

And Carl Levin responded, "They said he's a name candidate and they're right. His name is Sandy."

THE BIGGEST lump-in-the-throat moment came when the Levin brothers and their wives and children gently maneuvered the wheelchair in which "Mother Bess" was seated and gave her star billing. Sander Levin introduced his mother as "the youngest in spirit."

Levin, his arm around his wife, Vicki, talked about their partnership and close association of more than a quarter of a century — not only during political campaigns.

Matthew Levin, 14, was 2 years old when his dad first ran for gov.¹ error, but he remembers that campaign and others which followed. Jennifer, 24, Andrew, 21, and Madeleine, 19, are also among Levin's most loyal boosters.

Candidates agree it's good homespun politics to pose for pictures with their spouses and kids. But you get the feeling the Levin family isn't posing. It's for real and it's the human side of politics.



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—Michigan Bell Customer Andrea Cherry of Detroit

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"Let's Talk!"

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