

Proposal 13's fallout: big fees, bingo and cuts

AFTER THE smoke from the Michigan recall campaign clears, you can expect energy to be channeled to tax limitation proposals.

Everyone is for tax reductions. But a word of caution about those who promise dramatic cuts in your tax bill.

It's not that I don't believe in a Murphy's Law that says politicians' spending rises to consume all the tax dollars collected and then some. But I am wary of political opportunists who can't foresee that cutting taxes means cutting services.

Just remind yourself of Ronald Reagan's promise to cut taxes and increase defense expenditures while balancing the budget. Taxes have been cut, defense spending is up, and we are facing the largest deficits ever encountered.

Folks like Richard Headlee and Robert Tisch need to take a look at what has happened in California before they begin proposing massive tax cuts.

IT HAS BEEN five years since California passed Howard Jarvis' Proposal 13 by a 2-1 margin. The law rolled back property taxes to 1975 levels, set a new rate of 1 percent of the assessed value and limited assessment increases to 2 percent annually. It also prohibited governments from imposing any special taxes without the approval of two-thirds of the voters.

A hearty surplus in the state budget initially softened the effects of Proposal 13. But now the surplus is long gone, and politicians are looking for solutions for financially wounded cities and school districts.

According to the San Diego Union, most school districts have cut summer school and dropped some elective and extracurricular programs. Cities and counties have trimmed library services and recreation programs.

Schools and local governments have about 31,000 fewer employees than before the passage of Proposal 13.



Marilyn Fitchett

The San Jose school district has filed for bankruptcy. A district in Alameda County has set up a non-profit foundation to organize weekly bingo games to pay for music and sports programs.

Cities and counties transferred money for street, highway and sewer maintenance to their general fund budgets to keep daily programs operating. The city of Oakland cut its road budget to the point where it now budgets enough money to resurface each street every 275 years, the newspaper reported.

Fees — which aren't taxes — have been slapped on new house construction to pay for schools, libraries, streets, sewers, fire stations and landscaping. In some San Diego subdivisions, fees are close to \$20,000.

ANOTHER unexpected result from 13 has been the shift of authority over local spending to the California Legislature. A League of California Cities official said 13 has resulted in the "total reversal of the home-rule concept of local government." With the reduction in property taxes, local school boards and municipalities have to look to Sacramento for financial help.

And the solution to Proposal 13? You guessed it — more taxes. California municipalities and school boards are lobbying the legislature for the power to impose sales taxes or other non-property taxes.

Anyone who believes that government operates on a fat-free diet still believes in the tooth fairy. For those of us who don't, cutting taxes is still a desired goal, but not when it comes at the expense of necessary services.

'Proposal 13 — We love it!'



Appointment of judges is less chancy

EVERY SO often the issue of whether judges should be elected or appointed is discussed.

Those who trust untapped in the collective wisdom of the voting public believe that judges should be elected by the people.

Many in the legal community think that the public fares better and the state's system of justice is served better when the governor appoints judges.

Right now the public theoretically elects all the state's judges — district, circuit, appeals and supreme.

But since the governor has the power to appoint a judge to fill a vacancy — due to a death or a resignation — the governor has a powerful influence on the composition of the courts.

IN FACT, an appointment by the governor to the circuit court or higher in these parts is about tantamount to a lifetime appointment, even though the governor only has the authority to fill a vacancy until the next judicial election is held.

Once an attorney becomes a judge he earns the distinction of having a but of designation of "incumbent" in the next election. Since voters don't know much about judicial candidates they invariably vote for anyone who has the incumbent designation, providing he isn't a well-known swindler.

Since all attorneys recognize that incumbents have an inalienable right to be re-elected, they don't run against incumbent judges. They shoot for a judicial spot only when new judgeships are created.

This is where the trouble starts. Whereas the governor carefully screens candidates for judicial ap-



Bob Wisler

pointments, the electors tend to vote for names they recognize.

THE QUALITY of judicial appointments can be seen in the record of former Gov. William Milliken. During his 14-year tenure, he appointed 242 persons to the bench and almost invariably his appointees have served in their posts with distinction or gone on to higher court offices.

Milliken, for example, appointed the respected James L. Ryan of Redford Township first to the Wayne County Circuit Court and then to the Michigan Supreme Court.

He appointed nearly a third of the Wayne County Circuit Court and judges Steven Andrews, Robert Webster and George LaPlata to the Oakland Circuit bench. He has appointed competent district judges, distinguished appeals court judges and supreme court judges. Of all of Milliken's appointments, only one proved embarrassing.

The public should do so well.

IN MANY of our courts, there is an abundance of judges who have little in the way of judicial experience, competence and temperament.

Consider the case which I maintain is almost irrefutable proof that the public votes primarily for the name when it comes to electing judges or county officials. Last year voters in Livonia, Northville and Plymouth elected as the Democratic nominee for county commissioner a candidate who had no governmental or political experience and one who did not campaign.

He appeared at no public meeting, distributed no literature, spent no money, had no campaign organization, answered no questionnaire and, in fact, was in a hospital during much of the campaign.

Nevertheless, William Ryan, 51, a drive-in theater manager, beat his opponent by a 2-1 margin. When it comes to picking judges, I'd rather have the governor do the picking.

Michigan late in summer — heavenly?

EVERYONE HAS a favorite season of the year in Michigan, but we all relish late summer just the same.

Spring for some folks is the happiest time. Days are getting longer, the earth smells moist and fresh after a rain, the redwing blackbird leads the song-and-nesting parade, things just seem to come alive.

A kid can play outside longer after dinner, and the school term is drawing to a blessed conclusion. The Tigers have come north, and maybe this will be the year; it has been a long time since 1968. Canoeing is best in spring because the rivers are full, the air is cool, the bugs aren't bad yet, and the ducks are raising families.

WINTER HAS its devotees. There are the family fun of Christmas, lots of music, plenty of ples and Sking, both downhill and cross country, has its fans.

Some folks want to get away from it all during winter, to the sun and blue skies of Florida or the Caribbean. Not Kirsten, our youthful, exuberant Norwegian elkhood. Winter is when she can follow deer trails for three or four hours at a crack without getting overheated, then take a nap on a cake of ice when she's tired. But elkhoods are mildly crazy — everyone who knows them says so.

No one enjoys summer more than a kid. School is out. Swimming is in. That covers it.

YET EVERYONE loves late summer because in Michigan you can't beat the eating.

No more of those Georgia peaches that taste like sawdust. Michigan peaches are the sweetest and most savory fruit in creation, so good you don't



Tim Richard

even want to wait for the ice cream.

And sweet corn! There are all sorts of good spots to get sweet corn, but our favorite is a farm in Livonia, of all places — one of the 10 biggest cities in the state. Real connoisseurs boil and consume it immediately, without a moment's delay. The natural sweetness is unsurpassed. There's no way frozen or canned corn can match it, even when the processors lace it with sugar.

And I know where to get berries this time of year. Don't know whether to call them huckleberries or black raspberries because there is some technical difference. No matter. The spot is out in Livingston County off old Grand River. No one goes there this time of year because people hate to walk more edge of a hundred feet from their cars. That's their tough luck. It's a bit of work to pick them, so you have to eat lots as you go along, to keep up your strength.

LATE SUMMER is also when you get fresh tomatos off the vine. There are so many that we wind up canning most of them to use in vegetable soup or chili sauce the other three seasons.

But to my way of thinking, the only way to enjoy a tomato is to pick it fresh and slice it, without ever subjecting it to refrigeration.

In late summer the fish begin biting again, right about the time most city folks quit fishing. My favorite spot is a meandering chain of ponds in western Oakland County with sharp dropoffs at the edge of the lily pads. You use a cane pole and big, fat crickets, and be sure you keep tension on the line because those saucer-shaped bluegills will suck the cricket right off the hook if your line's slack.

One year we got to the Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany, and I thought I'd died and gone to Himmel with all that sauerkraut and sausage — and red cabbage and Hofbrau and Augustinian beer. But the following late August, I returned to my senses and realized late summer in Michigan is best of all.

Whether work or play, we took the streetcars

JUST FOR old times sake, The Stroller took a ride into downtown Detroit a few weeks ago with the hope of seeing some of the old scenes he knew when he came out west from the Pennsylvania Dutch country three-score years ago.

What a change! The streetcars were gone. Even the tracks have been buried. He learned they were covered when the old method of travel gave way to the automobile and buses. But it was interesting just to stand at what was then Kinross' corner and recall the races for the streetcar at the crossings.

AT THE TIME, The Stroller lived on Delaware Avenue. That was two blocks north of Grand Boulevard on the west side of Detroit.

To go to and from the Free Press office, he had to take a streetcar on the Trumbull line. That was fine, except that the streetcar didn't go as far north as Delaware Avenue. It stopped one block below. So The Stroller had to walk a block to go to work

and then early in the morning — after the last edition — he had to walk over to Capitol Park to get the car at the switch.

There is no trace of this line — or any other line — today. And the streetcars are just a memory.

But their memory lives on. And today we may see streetcars again if SEMTA builds a "light rail rapid transit line" in the Woodward and Gratiot corridors. Those lines would be modern streetcars.

IN THE EARLY 1920s, there were three separate systems using the tracks in downtown Detroit.

The Detroit Street Railway handled most of the traffic inside the city. It had what now could be looked upon as a strange limitation. It went only as far as Seven Mile and Woodward, and the termination was marked by an old log cabin. Some of the stores still carry the log cabin trademark.

The other lines were the Detroit Interurban and the Detroit United Lines. It was on the Interurban that The Stroller spent many of his holidays.



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

It was the practice then to get on one of the so-called "summer cars" — they were open — and ride to Fort Huron. We'd stop for lunch and then take the ride back.

This was in the days when Gratiot Avenue was a dirt road and the I-94 freeway was only a wild dream. But it was an interesting ride, and it's too bad such a trip is not possible today.

GONE, TOO, is the favorite ride to Navin Field (now Tiger Stadium). This was a nice ride from downtown, and the cars were lined up on both

Trumbull and Michigan avenues to collect the after-the-game crowds.

On opening day, it was a sight to see the visiting teams offloading from their downtown hotels to the ballpark while wearing their playing uniforms.

Another fond memory was recalled as The Stroller stood downtown. Because of a quirk, he never had to pay a cash fare while riding to and from work at the office. It so happened that one of the high school correspondents — a fellow named Louis Zeckman, who later became a highly regarded attorney — worked as a conductor on the Baker line after school.

This line ended at Lafayette and Shelby — one block from the Free Press office. Every time Louis came in with his report from Northeastern High School, he left a pad of transfers. They always came in handy.

Well, the streetcars are gone, but before they departed, they played a leading role in our lives.