

# Opinion

Robert Sklar editor/477-5450  
Kathleen Moran assistant managing editor

33203 Grand River Ave./Farmington, MI 48024

Philip Power chairman of the board  
Richard Aginlan president  
Dick Isham general manager  
Steve Barnaby managing editor  
Fred Wright circulation director

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## Be wary Cast your vote with care

A monthly peek into Bob Sklar's notebook

**M**ANY WHO hope to become public servants are destined for the political scrapheap. They go off half-cooked in pursuit of positions of power viewed as political plums.

They come across as foolish by their lack of comprehension of even the most rudimentary local issues.

And they excel at straddling the political fence, then changing their posture toward the prevailing thinking of the day.

On Monday, June 9, Farmington Public Schools voters will elect two school board members from among incumbents Janice Rolnick and R. Jack Inch and challenger Paul Blizman. Fortunately, all appear to be well-qualified.

In view of a no-nonsense list of public matters that cry out for comment, lively stumping on the campaign trail is virtually assured. And that's dandy.

A blase approach by any of the candidates would be a mistake if early rumblings in the community are any indication.

**MANY VOTERS** already seem to have strong opinions about what's good -- and what's not -- in the 10,000-student district. They're on the lookout for leaders with vision, tact and enterprise.

So let's encourage a vigorous debate. A worthy candidate should be able to demonstrate an understanding of such board basics as curriculum needs, enrollment patterns and budget analyses.

The school board is faced with such pivotal assignments as acclimating a new superintendent and instituting new elementary boundaries.

It also is caught up in such long-term considerations as enrollment growth, preschool programs, computer literacy,



Bob Sklar

graduation requirements and building renovations. And there's the ever-changing world of school finances.

**WHAT'S MORE**, Father Time marches on. Next year, Farmington High's Class of 2000 will enter kindergarten. Another skill characteristic of a caring school trustee is the ability to communicate -- within the district, with the public and with other governmental groups.

For example, there's still room for fence-mending between the school board and the Farmington Hills City Council over the city's now-abandoned plan to use tax increment financing to improve 12 Mile Road.

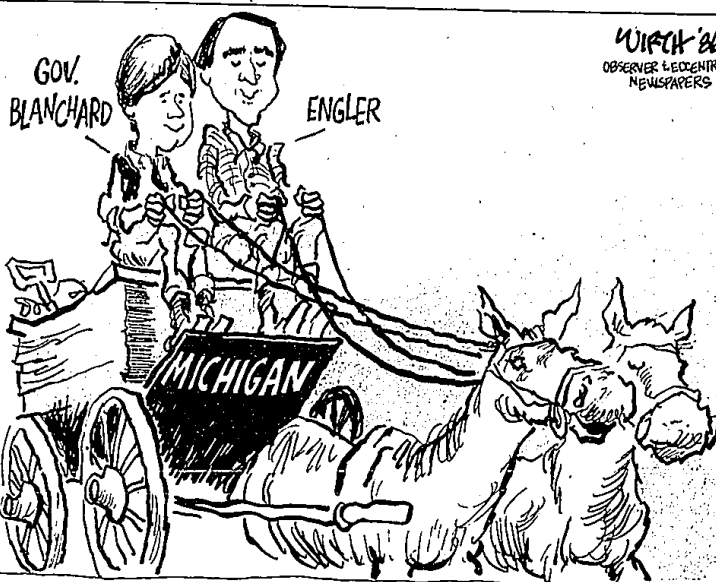
Unquestionably, the district requires leaders who have a hand on the district's pulse and a sense of setting and fulfilling goals.

There's no place on the school board for those with a limited attention span, those who lack physical or emotional vigor or those who are overbearing or narrowminded.

**THE 1988 school board race** is shaping up to be unpredictable. Incumbency won't mean certain victory.

And that's heartening.

No candidate should have the luxury of winning without displaying not only a solid grasp of school district affairs, but also an abiding interest in this community's greatest resource -- its young people.



## State has 2 fine leaders

**TWO KEY** figures call the shots in Michigan's state capital. The state is better off for having both of them.

You already know that one is Gov. James J. Blanchard. A very different kind of figure is Sen. Majority Leader John Engler of Mount Pleasant -- different somewhat in politics, far different in style, and far more productive legislatively than his Democratic counterpart, House Speaker Gary Owen.

Shortly after Engler took the reins, Sen. R. Robert Geake of Northville, one of the senior Republicans in Lansing, called Engler the best of three leaders he has worked with -- tireless, innovative, grasping a wide variety of issues.

### CONSIDER:

• The chamber Engler leads spotted the liability insurance/tort reform problem months before Owen and Blanchard and developed its bills.

• Engler's troops responded faster on the Essential Auto Insurance problem and cleanup of voter registration. (The first issue was compromised; the latter lost.)



Tim Richard

• Engler's troops put so much heat on the governor that the administration settled for a much earlier rollback of the 1983 income tax increase.

• Engler commissioned a forward-looking Hudson Institute study of Michigan's economy, with closeups of several cities.

• Engler, himself, a central farmlands resident, shows up in Detroit and the suburbs for speeches -- and sometimes just to learn, as when he visited an inner-city soup kitchen one zero-degree winter day. No other majority leader of either party I've seen has got around so much.

**BLANCHARD HAS** put most of his eggs into two baskets -- the business climate and education. His State of the State messages are a fraction the length of Bill Milliken's.

With middle-class suburban values, a master of business administration degree and congressional experience on the banking committee, Blanchard has little in common with such business-baiters as Sam Fishman of the AFL-CIO, Attorney General Frank Kelley and the Ralph Nader types.

His Commerce director, Doug Ross, recently stole Engler's line -- Michigan must become "competitive" again.

"Corporation" is no longer a dirty word in the upper reaches of a Democratic administration. I liken that achievement to President Nixon's opening America's doors to Red China.

After taking a public relations beating his first year in office by keeping his nose to the grindstone, Blanchard now tours the state, and develops contacts with community newspapers so assiduously, that he's accused of being a shallow "good news" governor.

Your own ideology likely will put you in one camp or the other. I would say that each camp ought to appreciate its leader.

## You could help save a chunk of history

"**WHADYA CALL** this, Steve?" said the reporter. In her hand was a pamphlet containing information about a medical service that uses helicopters to transport patients.

Moving over to my desk, she pointed at the bottom of the aircraft.

"Skids, s-k-i-d-s," I replied automatically, gazing at the helicopter's landing gear.

It's been a while, 18 years, since I've thought seriously about helicopters, a symbol of a war in which I once participated. But some things never leave you. For me "skid" was one of those things. It has been packed away in the back of my brain for nearly two decades. In an instant, the brain dusted it off and threw it into my mouth.

As infantrymen, we would stand on the skids as the helicopters came in for a landing. Chopper pilots had an aversion to actually landing, especially when we were getting shot at. So we would jump, sometimes from as high as 10 or 12 feet -- usually into knee-high mud.

So skids I remember. **LATER THAT** day a colleague caught me in the cafeteria.

"Steve, I've gotta have my B-17 book back. My dentist and I are having an argument about them. Imagine, he's trying to tell me about B-17s."

That was hard to imagine. My colleague, Frank Kinney, spent an appreciable amount of time flying over Europe in the famous World War II bomber known as the "Flying Fortress." For a World War II history buff like myself, talking with Frank is like meeting a piece of history. A few minutes with him and all those pictures crammed away in dusty history books of B-17 crews standing in front of their airplanes come alive.

Although Frank and I fought in different wars, I realize how precious those symbols of that once-in-a-lifetime experience are for him. And while plenty of helicopters buzz through the air, Frank's symbol is a vanishing breed.

And that would be a shame if those artifacts of another time just faded away. We need to remind ourselves how in times of conflict we are able to band together and survive.

**WE NEED** the symbols to give the children of our children something to touch, to feel and understand when the living symbols are gone.

The Yankee Air Force, a group with a museum at Willow Run, would like to preserve a little piece of that history. But the volunteer organization of aviation buffs is running short on time.

They've got less than 60 days to buy one of these mainstays of World War II airpower. At one time nearly 13,000 lumbered through the skies of Europe and over the Pacific.

But today only 12 remain. The problem is bucks -- \$280,000 to be exact. Now that's some bundle of cash for a machine that's more than 40 years old.

But just stop and think how it would make history come alive for future generations. Then, if you're so inclined, write a check to Flying Fortress Fund and send to Yankee Air Force, P.O. Box 1100, Ypsilanti, Mich. 48187.



crackerbarrel debate  
Steve Barnaby

## GOP race for guv -- ho-hum

**THE TROUBLE** I have with political campaigns is that I usually have a hard time figuring out where the campaign is. For example, where's the campaign for governor?

Gov. James Blanchard supposedly has a Democratic primary opponent, but I can't remember his name. The Republican primary campaign, which supposedly will come up with an alternative to Blanchard, is moving along like an earthworm hoping it can turn into a butterfly.

Not only is it dull, it is producing little enthusiasm for any of the candidates vying for the distinction of losing to Blanchard in November.

**IN STATE** elections, it used to be that candidates would criss-cross the state speaking to small groups and talking about what they think the campaign issues should be. Voters would head down to the town hall to see the candidate live. Newspapers would report on what the candidates had to say about the issues.

That's all changed. Nowadays, candidates mostly waste their time when they appear before small groups. They have to appeal to voters in big clumps, and the only sure-fire method of getting wide exposure is in television advertising.

Gubernatorial candidates mostly try to buy an image. Bill Lucas, the Wayne County executive who started the GOP campaign as the front runner, has even stopped going to candidates' meetings, saying he will use his time better raising money for advertising.

Acc Observer & Eccentric political reporter Tim Richard has been following



Bob Wisler

ing the candidates around the metropolitan area hoping to get a picture of what the candidates stand for and how they differ in their views of government and government spending.

**WHAT HE HAS** found is that Oakland County Executive Dan Murphy and Rep. Colleen Engler have programs to talk about but the other candidates don't. When asked about a subject, most give either off-the-cuff opinions or statements that sound as if they were spit out by some public relations/political consultant.

Newspaper stories talk about the relative standings of the gubernatorial candidates, as measured by the opinions of various Republican Party luminaries. In most of them, Lucas and Chrysler are ranked first and second while those with the programs are down the list.

There is no doubt that the GOP campaign up to now has been influenced primarily by Dick Chrysler's political ads on television.

Chrysler was earlier this year a minor Republican figure who was only known for pushing a relatively hopeless program of turning the state Legislature into a part-time body.

**THEN HE SPENT** almost a half-million on television advertising, which

showed him as the founder of a thriving car industry and the head of nice looking family. Boom. He became a force to be reckoned with even though his advertising said nothing about any issue involving government.

But, by the dint of advertising, it is beginning to look like Chrysler, now into his second round of TV ads, will push Murphy so far down in the relative pecking order that Dan won't be able to get up. More than one politician is predicting Chrysler will knock off Lucas in the August GOP primary.

It's probably far too early to predict that, however, since Lucas has yet to air his television ads showing how a poor boy from Harlem has been able to work his way up in the political system from New York cop, to FBI agent, to sheriff, to county executive.

**THE LEADING** candidates aren't likely to talk about any real governmental issues, such as the need for doing something about the state welfare system, how to deal with urban sprawl or whether the tax system will be changed so that there is less reliance on the property tax.

Instead they will conduct advertising campaigns trying to indicate to voters that they are as American as apple pie and that they believe in the old-fashioned virtues of family, hard work and self-sacrifice in rising up the ladder of success.

They will, in essence, try to use ads that spark the kind of response in voters that set off an emotional reaction. The ideal ad will be something like a successful Coca-Cola ad. Substance matters little if the style is right.

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