

Polls show Proposal A has best chance

Two school finance proposals are on the Nov. 7 state ballot, but the big battle is over Proposal A — a half-cent increase in Michigan's 4-cent sales tax.

Proposal A is close in the polls, with 47 percent favoring it and 50 percent opposed.

It is endorsed by Gov. James Blanchard and the business-labor establishment that served on the Hayden Commission. Their committee has been able to raise advertising money for a \$3 million campaign. Half is coming from the Michigan Education Association.

PROPOSAL B is more extensive in its potential impact — a 2-cent increase in the sales tax with school operating property tax cuts averaging 37 percent for farms and homes, 22 percent for businesses.

But Proposal B trails badly in the polls — 40 percent in favor and 56 percent opposed. Moreover, although the League of Women Voters and many outside school boards support it, they have yet to raise any big money to change voters' minds.

Chief opponents of both are the

Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, which commissioned the polls, and Taxpayers United, the group organized in 1977 by Richard H. Headlee, whose name is on the 1976 tax limitation amendment.

The Republican Party is deeply split. Half the 29 GOP state senators favor B. The other half oppose both — a group that includes John Engler, the probable 1990 gubernatorial nominee, and all Observer & Eccentric area Republican senators.

Proposal B would do more to help schools, particularly those near the \$2,500-per-pupil bottom of the scale, according to a staff analysis prepared for the House Democratic leadership.

Many outside Republican representatives concur. They point out that many districts are near the absolute 50-mill property tax limit contained in the state Constitution, and others are only one millage election away from it.

"NEW PRIORITIES, not new taxes," is the slogan of both the state Chamber and Engler, the Senate majority leader.

They argue that the Legislature reduced the portion of the state budget going to education over the last two decades.

Engler once talked of promoting a constitutional amendment to ratchet upward the proportion of the budget going to schools but shelved the idea. Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, argues Proposal A wouldn't be cost-effective.

For every \$4 Oakland residents pay in sales taxes, only \$1 would come back to their schools, he said. He believes that proportion holds for Western Wayne and other metro suburbs.

PROPOSAL A wouldn't cut property taxes, but it would pump something like \$390 million a year of new

money into public K-12 schools.

Part of the money would go into such "quality" programs as the governor's achievement incentives (GAIN) and funding of annual reports. The bulk would go into whatever state aid formula is devised by lawmakers.

The portion of Proposal A that often is overlooked, however, is the

dedication of all the new revenue, and part of existing taxes to a new, constitutionally protected school aid fund.

Dedicated taxes would include a penny of the present 4 percent sales tax, interest on the lottery funds and portions of the use, industrial facili-

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Here are the 2 school ballot proposals:

Here is the wording Michigan voters will see on the Nov. 7 ballot for two school finance proposals:

PROPOSAL A
A proposal to increase the sales/use tax from 4 cents to 4.5 cents per dollar and constitutionally dedicate funds for local schools.

The proposed constitutional amendment would:

1) Constitutionally dedicate to schools: a) half-cent increase in sales/use tax; b) Current statutory revenue sources, including lottery profits and some cigarette/liquor

taxes; c) Increased share of existing sales/use tax (51 percent to 68 percent) to substantially replace annual school appropriation.

2) Distribute dedicated funds to school districts as provided by law.
3) Activate increased statutory penalty to deny 100 percent of state funds to schools not adopting core curriculum and improvement plans.

Should this proposal be adopted?

PROPOSAL B
A proposal to increase the sales/use tax from 4 cents to 6 cents per dollar, reduce school property taxes, set permanent school operating mil-

lages not subject to voter renewal, and constitutionally dedicate funds for local schools.

The proposed constitutional amendment would:
1) Constitutionally dedicate to schools: a) 2 cents increase in sales/use tax; b) Current statutory revenue sources, including lottery profits and some cigarette/liquor taxes; c) Increased share of existing sales/use tax (51 percent to 75 percent) to substantially replace annual school appropriation.

2) Reduce property taxes in most school districts. Replace school tax-

es with permanent statewide millages (9 mills on residential/farm; 14 mills on businesses) plus non-voted local millage not subject to voter rollback. Limit voter-approved increases to 4 mills.

3) Set per-pupil funding guarantees subject to change by law requiring two-thirds vote.

4) Activate increased statutory penalty to deny all non-guaranteed state funds to schools not adopting core curriculum and improvement plans.

Should this proposal be adopted?

NEA chief takes aim at assembly line schools

By Wayne Peel
staff writer

Newly-elected NEA president Keith Geiger admitted a room full of lawyers and school board members was an unusual place to find a union leader — especially one making his first official visit to his home state.

But, contract talks aside, the head of the nation's largest teacher's union said there should be no difference between faculty, administration and community goals.

"We all want the same thing," said Geiger, a former teacher in the Livonia district and past Michigan Education Association president.

He's clear as to what that should be.

New, decentralized decision-making is needed, Geiger said, if America's schools are to prepare students for the 1990s and beyond.

"OUR NATION long ago entered the information age — but many of our schools remain trapped in the industrial age, or, even worse, the agricultural age," Geiger said last week in an address to the Michigan Council of School Attorneys.

Speaking at Cobo Hall, less than 1,000 feet from the spot where the Ford Motor Co. was chartered, the National Education Association chief said school districts need to change their "assembly line approach."

"The assembly line keeps churning students toward graduation," Geiger said. "Teachers have little or no voice in curriculum and precious little say in educational materials. Students, whether round, square, or triangular, are all forced into the same mold."

Site-based decision making, giving greater authority to principals and teachers, is the best solution to America's education crisis Geiger said.

Parents, he added, must be included in school decisions.

"I taught high school in the 1960s," he said. "And one of the worst things to come out of that era was that teachers and parents drifted very far apart. We need to correct that."

Geiger received polite, if not overwhelming applause from his audience, apparently winning their respect.

"He's a brave man for even being here," said council of school attorneys board member Barbara Rupa of Grand Rapids. The attorney group is an offshoot of the Michigan Association of School Boards.

Later, in an interview, Geiger said Michigan was on the right track in attacking inequality in school spending via next week's ballot issues, though he stopped short of issuing a personal endorsement.

"I KNOW the MEA is endorsing A," he said. "Though, as a Virginia resident, I haven't spent too much time studying either."

Schools of choice — currently a



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NEA president

hot issue in Michigan and other states — could be an answer to the nation's education crisis, Geiger said, but only if choice means magnet schools that provide special concentration on specific areas of study.

Merely eliminating district boundaries is no solution, he said.

"It's absolutely foolish to just throw open the doors as (Minnesota Gov. Rudy) Perpich has suggested," Geiger said. "What is needed are magnet schools. But I've never seen a magnet school that didn't cost more (than a standard school)."

Geiger will bring his beliefs to a presidential education advisory committee. He was recently appointed by President George Bush.

Schools aren't immune to problems in the family or in the local economy, he said, adding he will stress that point to government leaders.

"The federal government must take on increased responsibility for getting children to school at age 5, ready to learn," he said.

Geiger, 48, taught mathematics and science in the Livonia Schools. He was chosen NEA president in July, after spending six years as a vice president of the 1.98 million member union.

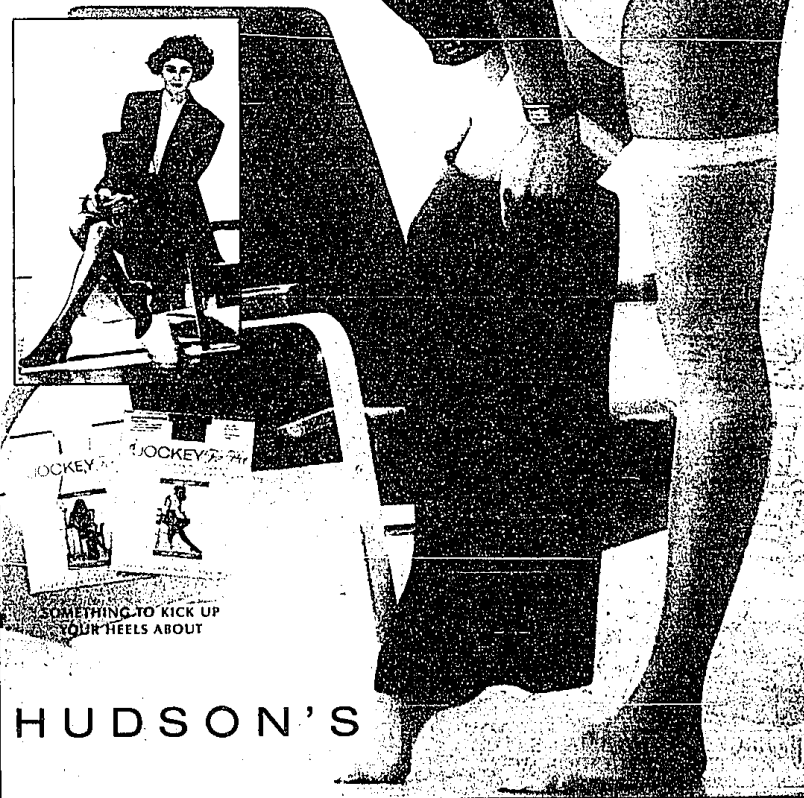
As NEA president, Geiger crosses the country speaking on education issues. More than half his appearances are before corporations and other non-union audiences.

Geiger and his wife, Janet, a third grade teacher, live in Fairfax, Virginia, a Washington D.C. suburb. The couple has two sons.

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SOMETHING TO KICK UP
YOUR HEELS ABOUT

HUDSON'S

MADD honors local police

Oakland County's law enforcement officers were honored recently by the Oakland County chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

They included Deputy Bruce Pearson of the Oakland County Sheriff's Alcohol Enforcement Team. Pearson has logged 850 OUIL (Operating Under the Influence of Liquor) arrests with a 100 percent conviction rate over the last six years.

Officers from departments serving our area included:

Jon Schultz, Beverly Hills; Mark Clemence, Birmingham; Steve Alexander, Bloomfield Hills; Norman P. O'Brien, Bloomfield Township; Terence D. Purves, Farmington; James Jarrett, Farmington Hills; James Hirschfeld, Franklin; Gregory M. Palmer, Keego Harbor.

Michael H. Walekowsky, Orchard Lake; Dennis Markham, Rochester; Southfield's 1989 Traffic Safety Unit; William McCabe, Troy and Steve Booth, West Bloomfield.