

Opinion

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Negative word

Outsiders can gripe, but incumbents have privilege

HURRY UP, election day, and get here. Some of these campaigns are getting kind of gamy.

Apparently some of our candidates have exhausted the real issues and have taken to an all-too-prevalent political practice: spreading the negative word about an opponent.

For example, we weren't real happy last week when Republican Denise Alexander, the Southfield city councilwoman who's challenging for a state Senate seat in our 15th District, decided to raise an issue (sort of) in the waning days of the 1990 campaign.

How awful, she moaned in print and voice, that Democrat Sen. Jack Faxon, her opponent, seemed to be mailing one official newsletter after another to the district's voters.

"His so-called 'newsletters,' paid for at taxpayers' expense tell us when he can be seen on local television, remind voters of the deadline for submitting absentee ballots, and tout his legislative attendance record," lamented Alexander in a prepared statement. "Is this not election related?"

Of course, Faxon "utilized his incumbent legislative mailing privileges" to spread the good word about himself, the challenger noted.

ALEXANDER's press release goes on for a page and a half, and concludes with the suggestion that the voters of the Fighting 15th "demand a refund and an apology for wasting our money."

We find it interesting, though, that nowhere in her diatribe does she say that she would never do something as low as using her office to keep her office.

Denise Alexander, are you telling us that you would never use all the trappings of incumbency to get the job done come campaign time? Especially in the face of a stiff challenge by a . . . well, by a Denise Alexander?

We find it interesting that nowhere in Alexander's diatribe did she say that she would never do something as low as using her office to keep her office.

The fact is that Jack Faxon is the man in the 15th District. He has been for 26 years.

He gets to put "State Sen." before his name. He knows (or should know) the best watering holes in old Lansing-town, and he gets to make himself look good in a newsletter.

If you win, Denise Alexander, you can do all that, too. Until then, you're an outsider. You're working hard to get in, to be sure, but you're still an outsider.

That's life. And politics.

THIS IS NEITHER an endorsement for Faxon, nor a put-down of Alexander. The endorsement comes a week from now, and we're saying right now that it'll be a tough call for us.

We've been impressed with both. They gave thoughtful answers to the tough questions posed by our reporters. We're sure both would serve the people of the 15th well.

We're just suggesting that now, in the waning days of this campaign, they stick to the issues they've both discussed so far. There are enough of them, after all.

Bringing up something new this late in the campaign — and then getting upset when the media doesn't tumble to it — is bound to raise a few eyebrows, especially when it's something as lame as Faxon's newsletter.

We just thought we'd mention it before things got really down and dirty, the way some political campaigns do in the waning days.

ELECTION

ENDORSEMENTS

The Courts

Circuit: Sheehy, Nichols tops

THE MOST IMPORTANT quality for a judge is judicial temperament — the ability to hold a fair hearing or trial, to give all parties their day in court.

With this in mind, we endorse a current district judge, James Sheehy, and an experienced legislator, Rudy Nichols, for the two new seats on the Oakland County Circuit Court bench in the Nov. 6 general election.

Sheehy, a Rochester district court judge for 10 years, has a reputation for running a fair, efficient courtroom. He is known for giving prompt attention to the court docket, with a majority of decisions made from the bench rather than overly researched and taken under advisement. That shows a judge who has done his homework.

We particularly liked that the judge he admires most "showed me the gentle side of the bench."

Sheehy is the only candidate for the Oakland circuit bench to receive the "preferred and well qualified" rating of Civic Searchlight Inc. Oakland Citizens League. He is also the only candidate to be endorsed by the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan.

NICHOLS, a state senator from Waterford, has a solid background in Lansing. He is assistant

majority whip and serves as chair of the judiciary committee and vice chair of the criminal justice, urban affairs and economic development committee.

According to our Capital correspondent, Nichols enjoys a high degree of confidence from both parties, runs the fairest hearings in Lansing and is thoroughly informed on every bill that comes before him.

Nichols practiced municipal law before his election to public office eight years ago. He would bring to the bench an important perspective, having helped write many of the laws judges apply.

Nichols received a "well qualified" rating from the Oakland Civic Searchlight group, the other two candidates received only a "qualified."

Residents who have cable television have the opportunity to hear the four candidates respond to questions posed by the Oakland County Bar Association on the "Due Process — Meet the Candidates" half-hour program and by the League of Women Voters.

Don't let this important position be left to name recognition or money spent on campaigning. You can make an informed intelligent choice. In our estimation, that would be James Sheehy and Rudy Nichols.

and concise. In a non-partisan race, her politics, like her personality, are moderate.

E. Thomas Fitzgerald, a 24-year trial lawyer from Owosso, is the flashier orator and has more experience actually taking cases to the appellate courts. He comes from the liberal end of the legal spectrum — the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association.

A number of serious viewers of this race have noted that neither candidate has been a lower court judge. Hallmark's court referee experience, however, shouldn't be overlooked.

It's fashionable to complain about politicians and campaigns. Voters should have no complaints in the Hallmark-Fitzgerald race.



Which way success?

School law no guide

I HATE writing columns like this. But here goes.

At long last, Michigan schools are moving toward defining what children are supposed to learn in class. That is what the state Department of Education means when it talks about "outcomes" that are to be the result of the new "core curriculum" adopted last year. That's the good news.

The bad news is that I cannot find anywhere in the blizzard of paper now drifting around the program any discussion of just how schools propose to define and measure what children are supposed to learn.

It's bad because defining what you want to do while at the same time declining to measure how you are doing assures us that nothing will happen in the effort to reform our schools.

ALL THIS comes about through passage last year of state Public Act 25. It required local school districts to "develop and deliver instruction to all students based on a model core curriculum . . . (to) articulate the broad outcomes to be achieved by all students as a result of their school experiences."

Great — an improvement over the old idea that 12 years of schooling guaranteed kids would learn something.

In carrying out this policy, the state Department of Education has described what a student who has undergone the core curriculum would be like: "competent and productive participant in society," "creative, sensitive and flexible," "capable of learning over a lifetime" and so forth.

And the department has set out the topic areas for the curriculum: arts, health and physical skills, language arts, science and math, and world studies. The department even makes a gesture toward the world of work by mentioning the academic, personal management and team-work skills "necessary for a person

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to obtain, maintain and progress in a job."

So far, so good.

NOW COMES the problem. When the department gets around to defining and assessing success, it gets measly mounded.

"Measurement of student attainment of the desired educational outcomes at the state, district and building level is an integral part of a good core curriculum model." OK, how?

"Appropriate assessment techniques should be used to accurately measure student attainment of the various content, process and skill outcomes."

Which techniques? They never say, neither in all the paper I've seen nor when asked orally in public or private. And I get very suspicious whenever somebody in government starts talking about "appropriate assessment techniques" without saying what those are.

My suspicion started to thicken into irritation when I read the detail about the skills outcomes.

In math, kindergarten through third-grade students will "add, subtract, multiply and divide using models and add, subtract and multiply using computational algorithms with numbers appropriate to the models." But will they know their tables down cold?

The writing outcomes are even more bewildering. Organized into



Philip Power

areas of "prewriting, drafting, revising, proofreading, publishing," the discussion never seems to focus on the idea that children should learn to write clearly, logically and quickly.

A GREAT SHAME, because PA 25 represented a terrific start in reforming our schools.

Why have the State Board of Education and the department ignored the real point of any reform: measure of performance? They may be bureaucratic, but these people are neither knaves nor fools.

I believe they are responding to a political fear. They're scared to death they'll be accused of bringing in a set of statewide required courses, standards and examinations, thereby destroying our treasured local autonomy of schools.

In Washington, the story is that there's a reason nothing whatsoever has come out of the much-trumpeted "Education Summit" between the president and the nation's governors. The folks in the White House don't want anything to happen for fear President George Bush will be accused of destroying the sacred cow of local autonomy.

This is a legitimate political issue, one that ought to be debated just like how best to finance schools. But the debate ought to be out in the open, not disguised by mumbo jumbo about "appropriate assessment techniques."

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

from our readers

Sees park as 'sterile'

More letters — See page 19A

To the editor:

In the two years I've been a Farmington Hills resident, I've had many occasions to enjoy its pleasant Heritage Park.

What I saw on my last hike there, however, greatly disturbed me. The park, as I first saw it, was a natural area, beautiful in its own natural beauty.

What I see there now is also pleasing to the eye, but I wonder why the individuals planning this park have chosen to replace a real natural setting with a pseudo nature motif.

It might be appropriate for creating something from nothing, but certainly pointless as a replacement for the natural beauty that was already there.

What I see now is a highly stylized, extremely sterile park. Probably very suitable in a city environment, as part of development for wasted land that needs green things, rock and earth where previously there was none.

THERE IS, of course, a vast difference between a real natural environment and an aesthetically pleasing manufactured one.

How long, I wonder, before the sand volleyball courts become concrete, like the concrete ostensibly poured for Boy and Girl Scouts to demonstrate their skills?

And when will ball diamonds come to this passive park? Or soccer fields? What is not, I'm sure, based on the ever-increasing parking spaces, we can expect more . . . and more.

The citizens of Farmington Hills have been duped. They expected a pleasant nature area and instead will have a veritable showpiece, sans any real trace of real nature, save that which might be hardy enough to withstand the all-out efforts to destroy it.

What a pity.

Pat Nader,
Farmington Hills

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