

Judicial pick Jack McDonald gets our nod

Jack McDonald. Tough call, but there it is. We're supporting John "Jack" McDonald for judge in the 47th District Court in Farmington on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 3.

Why such a difficult decision? Simply because there happen to be two excellent candidates (Maria Parker, attorney and a magistrate in the court, is the other one) for this judgeship, which falls open with the retirement of Margaret Schaeffer.

Both McDonald and Parker seem to have the skills — legal and people — required to sit in judgment in district court, where jurists are servants of the people more certainly than at higher judicial levels. Too bad there aren't two open seats because both would be a credit to the court and the profession.

Alas, one must lose. We're hoping McDonald will win.

McDonald, a longtime attorney and former Oakland County Commissioner, seems to understand one very important thing about being a judge on this level: You have to be a good listener.

McDonald, 66, has been a trial attorney for 22 years. He began his career as an assistant county prosecutor so he has holds both prosecutorial

and defense experience.

Although McDonald said during a recent Observer interview that he thinks he's a "terrible politician," he's actually a very savvy one, having survived 14 years as a county commissioner. And let's be honest about it: District judgeships are political offices and need to be filled with politicians who possess special qualifications.

McDonald also can boast the kind of involvement in the community that should put him in good stead if Farmington-area voters decide he should ascend to the bench of the 47th District Court.

He's chaired the Year 2000 study for the city of Farmington Hills, sits on the city's Ethics Committee and is involved in a number of legal groups.

We think that McDonald would work hard to make the public feel comfortable with the local judicial branch of government — no small task considering that that's where people often have to go when there's trouble in their lives.

Well, while we're touting Jack McDonald for this election, we again have to acknowledge that Magistrate Maria Parker also has excellent qualifications. We do favor McDonald in a close call, though, and that's probably how the election will turn out — close, one way or the other.

Patterson must lead region

By habit, L. Brooks Patterson has been a gut-fighting roustabout. He also has given time and leadership to numerous charitable causes.

The skills he has used to build support for the charitable work in which he is involved are the major skills he must call upon if he is to be an effective executive for Oakland County.

The executive job demands a bridge builder, not a bridge burner. The executive can't take adversarial positions and win before a jury. The executive needs to seek cooperative solutions to problems, borrowing ideas when necessary, even from his opponents.

Patterson appears to realize that. He proposes a roundtable of business people to help him create a ripe business climate for Oakland. He plans, during his first months in office, to poll employees in each county department to get their views on making it more efficient.

And then, he says, he will act.

As executive, Patterson no longer will have the luxury of throwing bricks across Eight Mile at Detroit politics. He can go a long way to mend his image by following retiring county executive Dan Murphy's example and be visible and cooperative in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

And he must make good on his pledge to attend to the needs of our aging inner suburbs.

His opponent, Betty Howe, correctly assesses what is wrong with Oakland County government and urban sprawl. But it is difficult to see, given the political climate, how she can effect real change.

Patterson has the ability and charisma to move Oakland County government — to make it run more efficiently and take on a regional leadership role.

Tax plan is bad for education

In previous editorials, we have opposed Proposal C for two reasons.

First, the "cap" plan will result in neighbors with similar houses paying different tax bills — punishing young homebuyers.

Second, Proposal C promises the state will reimburse school districts for the revenue they would lose under the 30 percent "cut," but there's not enough money to pay them without (a) endangering public and workplace safety or (b) raising state taxes significantly, which Gov. John Engler refuses to admit will be necessary.

There is a third set of reasons for rejecting "Cap" provided by our local school districts.

Oakland County districts

"I can't say the state isn't going to pay us back. But five years from now, the state will be picking up 30 percent of our budget. Do we trust the state to cough up 30 percent?" — Frank Lams, Avondale finance director.

"This proposal is wanting dramatically. We'd all like to pay less property tax, but at what cost? It's too big a risk to take." — Geoffrey Hockman, Birmingham trustee.

"The plan to reimburse schools through new economic growth is a fairy tale." — Linda Finkel, Bloomfield Hills trustee.

"He (Engler) is counting on the economy and the money to just come back in... You'd wonder every year, are we going to get the money or aren't we?" — David Flammer, Walled Lake board.

"If you cut property taxes, there has to be something there to offset that loss" — Thomas Goulding, West Bloomfield assistant superintendent.

In the fifth year under Proposal C, "It will mean a \$30 million decrease in operating funds. We'll also be looking to the state treasury each year for a \$30 million reimbursement. And, of course, that amount will grow" — Bruce Barrett, Farmington assistant superintendent for finance.

"We'd tend to lose about \$83 million over five years... We haven't received \$83 million from the state in many years, and I don't think we're going to see that." — Mike Dixon, Troy schools business director.

Anyone who is serious about cutting local property taxes must spell out in advance what state taxes will be raised to pay for them. Proposal C fails dismally. "Cut & Cap" will cut the quality of life and cap Michigan's recovery.

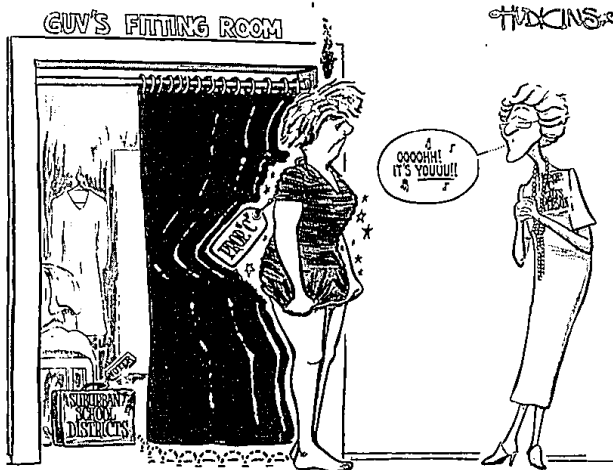
No' on A, too

Proposal A is the orphan plan. It was placed on the ballot by the state Legislature, but its supporters have abandoned it, and no committee was formed to argue its case to voters.

Proposal A would cap property assessments at 5 percent. The property would be reassessed when the home is sold.

It has the same flaw as Proposal C — a homebuyer 10 years from now will pay higher taxes than a neighbor in an identical house who stays put. Proposal A is fundamentally unfair and potentially demoralizing to taxpayers. It, too, should be defeated Nov. 3.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Misleading edit

I would like to set the record straight about your reference Oct. 16 to "almost incumbent" for candidate Maria Parker and "good ole boy" Jack McDonald — both running for District Judge.

Your reference to Parker as "almost incumbent" is totally misleading.

Actually, it would be closer to the truth to refer to myself as "almost a magistrate."

You only need to be a registered voter, not even an attorney, to be a magistrate. In some cities they use clerks to perform the same duties as our magistrates.

The other misleading reference is to her job. A "typical day" for Maria Parker is not as a magistrate.

She works only three or four days a month as a magistrate — hardly a stepping stone to being a judge.

Your reference to Jack as a "good ole boy" is

not far off because Jack has been around long enough — 27 years — to be considered one of the boys who have made this community what it is today.

That is why both mayors and 11 of 12 council members support Jack for Judge.

The race for 47th District Court Judge is between a part-time magistrate and a well-experienced trial attorney.

The decision belongs to the voters. In this instance, they will be the judges.

Terry Sever, campaign manager for John McDonald

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Proposal C cuts state revenue

I t's beginning to look as though the only close contest in Michigan's elections will be over Proposal C, cutely named "Cut & Cap."

If adopted, the proposal would cut local property taxes levied to support schools by 30 percent over five years and limit assessment increases to 3 percent a year. The state would automatically reimburse local schools for lost revenues.

Supporters include Gov. John Engler and the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce. Opponents include labor unions, school folks and a bunch of Michigan dignitaries, including former Gov. William Milliken.

Despite a bunch of mutually misleading TV ads, polls so far indicate that likely Michigan voters are pretty much split down the middle on Proposal C, with a lot of folks undecided.

Everybody agrees that Michigan's property tax burden is too high, especially when compared to our Great Lakes neighbors. And when pressed, everybody even agrees that Michigan's total tax burden is no higher than our neighbors'.

So if the effect of Proposal C were merely to shift the basis of taxation from real property to something else like income, there would be little debate.

But it's not that simple. It now seems clear that Proposal C would cut, probably drastically, into state revenue. And nobody I have talked to in Lansing, Republicans or Democrats, has the slightest idea how to pay for it.

Watch the numbers for the first year Proposal C is in effect.

Assuming no other big tax increase (Gov. Engler's vow), the state will have to reimburse local school districts nearly \$420 million to pay for their lost revenue.

Maybe that cost can be made up for by revenue growth. Let's get real optimistic and say the recession ends, so Michigan's revenues increase by \$500 million in 1993-94. That leaves the state \$80 million ahead.

But that \$80 million won't cover the \$342 million in one-time accounting gimmicks and fund raids approved by the Legislature to balance this year's budget.

So the state of Michigan will have to find something like \$250 million to cover the difference.



PHILIP POWER

Where? Oh, from non-essentials like the State Police or our state parks system. Or from appropriations to universities. Or from what's left of our mental health system.

The potential for truly serious damage to Michigan is so great under Proposal C that it's fair to ask, what's really going on here?

I think the answer is simple: Gov. Engler and others have looked with admiration at the number President Reagan and his crew did to the federal budget. Convinced that government itself was the problem, they figured that if taxes could be cut enough to provoke a horrendous deficit, the result would be a radical cut in the size of government.

Their only mistake was that Washington insiders (Congress, President Bush) were quite prepared to finance government operations by running up the deficit.

But Michigan has a constitutional prohibition against deficit spending. So if you cut taxes radically through Proposal C and can't have a deficit, you must cut the size of state government.

What's really going on here is a radical attempt fundamentally to downsize Michigan's structure of governmental services, conveniently disguised as a proposal to reduce property taxes.

Radically cutting the size of state government may or may not be a good idea. But it's an idea that should be debated and voted on according to its merits, not through the fiction of a cutely named ballot proposal.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

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