

Posthumus, Ross disagree on charter schools

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Two gubernatorial hopefuls sharply disagree over the purpose of public schools and how to regulate charter academies. Republican Dick Posthumus, the state Senate majority leader, focuses on parents. He wants to meet parents' needs and give parents "more options. . . more ability to determine what their children ought to do."

Democrat Doug Ross, former state and federal Labor Department official, focuses on stu-

dents. He wants kids to be better prepared for the future world of work by meeting high state assessment standards.

To Posthumus, 47, of Alto, the "basics" means "providing parents with the ability to provide their children with the best education."

To Ross, 64, of West Bloomfield, the "fundamentals" means "defining performance" of students and getting "results" from classrooms because "suddenly we have to educate everybody to a much higher level."

■ **"I won't support taxpayer dollars for religious education."**

*Dick Posthumus
—gubernatorial candidate*

Allow parochialism?

Ross, anetime consumer lobbyist and a state senator from 1979-82, is flatly opposed to amending the Michigan Consti-

tution to allow vouchers and parochialism. "I don't want to put my money into Michigan Milton High or Skunkhead Intermediate where they're teaching racial or religious hatred. Under the constitution, you can do it, but not with my money," he said.

Posthumus, who has worked 14 years in the shadow of incumbent Gov. John Engler, didn't directly answer the parochialism question. "I won't support taxpayer dollars for religious education," he said, indicating a line between supporting parochial

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*Doug Ross
—gubernatorial candidate*

schools when they teach academics but not when they teach religion.

The pointed but polite

exchange will be broadcast Sunday on Channel 7's "Spotlight" public affairs program. The sole topic was issues in public education.

Posthumus is known to be itching to succeed Engler as governor and may be the lieutenant governor running mate in place of Connie Binfield, now 73, next year, though Engler has made no announcement.

Ross has announced he is seeking the Democratic nomination — an uphill "citizens' campaign" because rival Larry Owen has locked up many key labor endorsements a year before the primary.

They differed on public school academies, or "charter schools." Under Michigan law, state universities are granting contracts to groups seeking to set up specialized schools with state money. Charter schools get the same \$5,600 per pupil but do not operate with voter-elected boards.

Low MEAP scores

They were asked about the low MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) scores in science and writing that three-fourths of charter schools turned in compared to regular public schools, even in urban areas.

"The idea behind charter schools," said Ross, "was that they were places within the public school system where you could innovate and experiment. It's a worthwhile objective."

"My biggest objection is that Michigan is one of the very few states that allows money to go to pre-existing private and religious schools that convert themselves to charter schools. It's like vouchers. It's siphoning dollars from public schools for private and parochial schools," Ross said, adding:

"I think what the governor and Sen. Posthumus are trying to do is replace public schools with a voucher plan."

Replied Posthumus: "We brought charter schools into being for a couple of reasons. We need to provide parents with an option. When their local public school wasn't doing the job, we needed to provide another public school alternative — charters."

He added, "Fifty percent of kids going to charter schools today are minorities."

"That means we're meeting the needs of parents who felt their local school wasn't safe for the child or wasn't providing for its academic needs. If that parent decides it (charter school) isn't doing the job, they'll take their kids out. In fact, we had one charter school close down because parents pulled their kids out."


Plug loophole

Ross wants to amend the charter school law so that private and parochial schools can't qualify for charter status.

Replied Posthumus: "That can only happen if a public entity — like a university or community college — charters that school. That can only happen if it (charter applicant) meets public school academic requirements."

"We have to stop bashing teachers," said Ross. "This governor has declared war on virtually everybody connected with our kids' education."

Posthumus said legislative "listen-ins" show teachers favor Republican policies, even if teachers' unions are opposed.



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