

POINTS & VIEW

Election bound to produce plenty of ticket-splitters.

So here we are, less than a week before election day in what certainly will go down in the history books as among the most bizarre elections in Michigan political history.

I'm obliged to warn readers of this column: I've got more than an academic interest in this time around. I'm on the ballot myself, running for re-election to the University of Michigan Board of Regents.

Earlier in the campaign, when it became clear that Geoffrey Fieger was making no headway against Gov. John Engler, lots of politicians were thinking in terms of a historic Republican tidal wave sweeping the ballot from top to bottom.

But things can change quickly in politics. The GOP leadership in Congress overreached in trying to milk the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton. To their surprise, the national news media discovered most folks beyond the Beltway were more interested in appropriations and policy -- the stuff of governing -- than in Monica Lewinsky. And Fieger figured out how to quit shooting himself in the foot every time he

opened his mouth.

So my guess is this: After people get through doing whatever they're going to do for governor at the top of the ballot, they'll go back to being the kind of sane, rational, ticket-splitting voters that Michiganders have always been.

For example, even though Gov. Engler has a big lead, Democrat Jennifer Granholm is running a very strong race against Republican John Smetanka to succeed "eternal" Attorney General Frank Kelley. I've seen no evidence that any incumbent members of Congress, Republican or Democratic, are in trouble. With term limits retiring two-thirds of the old members, nobody knows much about anybody who's running for the State House of Representatives.

So voters are going to be scanning down their ballots, looking for sensible candidates from either major party and splitting their tickets accordingly. For competent candidates of both parties, who find themselves condemned to relative anonymity, the challenge is to find ways to cut through the information



PHILIP POWER

vacuum to find ways to inform voters that there are pockets of sanity and competence well worth searching out.

It was ever thus in Michigan, at least since the 1964 election, when Democratic President Lyndon Johnson carried Michigan by more than one million votes over Republican Sen. Barry Goldwater, while Republican Gov. George Romney trounced Neil Staebler, his Democratic opponent, by nearly 400,000. That's a swing of 1.4 million votes, a veritable orgy of ticket-splitting!

In fact, the Michigan data were so remarkable as to form the basis of an influential book, "The Ticket-Splitter," written in 1972 by V. Lance Tar-

rance Jr. and Walter DeVries. They argued that American voting patterns, historically oriented toward straight ticket voting, had changed in the 1960s, giving rise to wholesale ticket-splitting.

A just-published book by Tarrance, "Checked & Balanced: How Ticket-Splitters Are Shaping the New Balance of Power in American Politics," confirms the trend. Nearly 70 percent of voters surveyed told Roper Center pollsters that they "typically" shun straight-ticket voting.

There's another factor, too, in the rise of ticket-splitting: The mechanism of the way people cast their votes. In the old days, when people voted with machines, it was easy to vote a straight ticket. You pulled the lever at the top of your party's column on the ballot. Not only did this cast your ballot for all candidates of your party, but the mechanics of the voting machine physically prevented you — locked you out — from voting for any candidates from the other party.

Today's machines, either the optical scanners or the punch card, subtly promote the process of working down

the ballot — line by line, page by page, office by office — scrutinizing the candidates and voting back and forth between parties. Sure, with either machine, you can vote a straight ticket by marking the box at the top of the ballot.

But with both punch card and optical scanner machines, you can vote straight and then vote for one or two candidates from the other party and have those votes count.

I'd guess this election will, once again, produce a lot of split tickets, just like most Michigan elections, where a basically sane electorate searches down the ballot for sensible candidates, regardless of party. But, whether you vote straight or split your ticket, it's very important you remember to vote!

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail: ppower@ecoonline.com

LETTERS

A bad law

It is sad to see the Observer take the editorial position that bad law is acceptable if it gets rid of a touchy subject such as Dr. Kevoorkian and the assisted suicide debate.

The Observer does this in its editorial endorsement of Proposal B in a roundabout way.

The Observer admits that a part of Prop B is seemingly unconstitutional in that it would fine and jail doctors who refuse to refer their patients to doctors who administer death, out of religious or ethical reasons.

That being so, the Observer seems to be willing to let these conscientiously objecting doctors suffer court proceedings and their overwhelming expenses when they express and defend their constitutional religious

and/or ethical rights. Rights that should not be brokered or tampered with.

This part of the law under Prop B is nothing but coercion and seems to be designed to force doctors who do not want to take any part in assisted suicide into doing so against their will. Plain and simple, it is Big Brotherism.

While admitting constitutional doubts regarding doctors in Prop B, why didn't the Observer mention other constitutional or law negating doubts in the proposal such as falsification of official records? The closing of the doors (press freedom) to the Open Meetings Act. No avenue of review or oversight of the practice or abuse of the Prop B law by any government body, not even by the branches of law enforcement includ-

ing the state attorney general.

That the only authority to have any sort of control of the Prop B law in any manner is to be a panel made up of selected people. People who must by law be advocates of assisted suicide and thus perhaps biased about exposing any short comings in the law and its enforcement, or in its use. Just how this law is used and executed is paramount and any transgressions must be known. Under Prop B, this could not happen.

Under Prop B, even the freedom of the press would be abridged in that the Observer itself could not report information if it heard rumors or reports of the abuse of the law and wanted to write about it.

Will the Observer settle for this abuse of its press rights when that time comes as surely it will? What

subject would be next?

Regardless of where one's sympathies are in regard to assisted suicide, Prop B is just a bad law and should be defeated on that basis alone. The way this law has been thought out and written makes it an example of why laws of this sort should be written by governmental lawmakers and not zealots from all walks of life. In seeking what they consider a right, they trample other rights and laws to reach their goal. Vote NO on Prop B. Wait for a good law. A bad law will take forever to correct.

Tom Murphy
Farmington Hills

Saying thanks

What a wonderful way to end my work week — to receive the Whole Foods Market check for \$910.39, representing Marian, Oakland-West's 5 percent bonus from their Sept. 30 sales.

As a nonprofit organization, it is difficult for us to realize the necessary income required to maintain our facility because our staff is limited. The wonderful sponsoring of these customer-appreciation days is an unexpected bonus, for which we are very grateful.

Our hats are off to Merchant of Vino-Whole Foods Market management for this community support program.

Elaine McDermott
Marian, Oakland-West

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