

Political parties line up on ballot proposals

BY KURT KUBAN
STAFF WRITER

When Farmington and Farmington Hills voters venture out to the polls Nov. 5, they will have to vote through a lengthy ballot.

In addition to numerous state and federal legislative and judicial races, voters will be faced with four state ballot proposals that could have far-reaching impacts on the state's already stretched budget.

The proposals deal with a diverse array of issues, from cleaning up the state's waterways to changing the way voters can vote.

Proposal 1, which was sponsored by Republican lawmakers, asks voters to eliminate the straight party voting option from the ballot.

Proposal 2 would authorize the state to borrow as much as \$1 billion to improve the water quality of rivers and lakes, through stormwater and sewage treatment projects.

Proposal 3 would amend the state constitution to allow the state's 42,500 classified employees the right to collective bargaining with binding arbitration when they have labor disputes. It would also give them the right to strike.

Proposal 4 would force the state to reallocate 90 percent of the tobacco settlement money won from cigarette companies to certain non-profit groups for

tobacco prevention and educational programs. If passed, the amendment would force the state to spend \$297 million annually on these programs.

As with many other issues, Democrats and Republicans are lining up on opposite sides of the proposals, with the exception of Proposal 2, which deals with stormwater and sewage treatment projects.

The two parties have also taken opposite positions on Proposal 1, which would eliminate straight party voting in Michigan's general elections. If passed, the amendment would force voters to go through the entire ballot, rather than check a single box to vote for all the candidates of one party.

The only place the parties seem to find common ground is with Proposal 2, which has nearly universal support. If passed, it would allow the state to borrow up to \$1 billion, through general obligation bonds, to finance sewage treatment works projects, stormwater projects, and water pollution projects.

Local units of government would be able to borrow funds for such projects from the State Revolving Fund, and repay the loans over 30 years. The state's House Fiscal Agency estimated the proposal would initially cost the state \$12 million annually, and grow to as much as \$63 million per year.

Know the ins and outs of ballot proposals

Voters will be faced with four state ballot proposals when they head to the polls Nov. 5. Here is a brief description of each:

■ **Proposal 1:** A "yes" vote would eliminate the "straight party" option on partisan general elections. The proposal was sponsored by Republican lawmakers.

Michigan voters have had this option for more than 100 years. It is estimated that as many as 40 percent of the state's voters use this option.

The Michigan Association of County Clerks and the Council of Election Officials, bipartisan groups representing clerks throughout the state, have opposed the proposal, because it would create longer lines and more congestion at the polls.

If passed, it would also permit voters in polls to correct errors, require registered voters who don't appear on registration list to show picture identification, require the Secretary of State to obtain training reports from local election officials, and provide penalties for the theft of campaign signs.

■ **Proposal 2:** A "yes" vote would authorize the state to borrow a sum not to exceed \$1 billion, through bonds, to improve water quality in the state's rivers and lakes by financing sewage treatment

works projects, stormwater projects and water pollution projects.

Local governments would be able to borrow funds for such projects from the State Revolving Fund, and repay the loans over a 30-year period, with an interest rate of five percent.

It is estimated the proposal would initially cost the state \$12.7 million annually, and grow to as much as \$63.6 million per year.

■ **Proposal 3:** Also known as MERIT (Michigan Employee Rights Initiative), the proposal is the result of a petition drive. A "yes" vote would amend the state constitution to grant state classified employees the right to collective bargaining with binding arbitration. It would also give them the right to strike.

It would require the state to bargain in good faith for the purpose of reaching a binding collective bargaining agreement with only elected bargaining representatives over wages, hours, pensions, and other terms of employment.

Currently there are 42,500 classified state employees. In addition, there are approximately 17,000 managerial, supervisory and confidential employees not currently represented by a union, who could unionize if Proposal passes.

The House Fiscal Agency estimates the proposal, if passed, will likely lead to higher wage and salary increases. Currently, a one percent increase in wages under current contracts would increase costs about \$30 million per year.

■ **Proposal 4:** A "yes" vote would amend the state constitution to reallocate the tobacco settlement revenue received by the state from the cigarette manufacturers.

The proposal, which is the result of a petition drive, would allocate on an annual basis 90 percent (approximately \$297 million) of the settlement revenue for certain health care-related purposes.

More than \$150 million would be given to nonprofit hospitals, licensed nursing homes and hospices, nurse practitioners, school-linked health centers and the Healthy Michigan Foundation.

In addition, \$102 million would go to fund programs to reduce tobacco use, including the Tobacco-Free Futures Fund. Another \$42 million would be allocated to the Elder Prescription Drug program.

In the state's 2002-03 fiscal year budget, \$215 million of the settlement money has already been appropriated for programs that don't meet the proposal's requirements.

Most environmental groups in the state have endorsed the proposal, including the Sierra Club. Anne Woiwode, director of the Sierra Club's Michigan chapter, said the biggest concern with the proposal is the

money might be used to encourage development.

"We support the reinvestment into our existing infrastructure, not the expansion into undeveloped areas. Our understanding is that's the way

the language is spelled out with this proposal. Though, I'm sure there will be people to challenge that in the future," she said.

"It's important the state gives local communities the opportu-

nity to fix existing infrastructure. One of our highest priorities is keeping pollution out of the state's waterways, and this is a good step in that direction."

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Maxfield: District did its best with sign

BY SUE BUCK
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The controversy over a message board at Harrison High School in Farmington Hills was really settled with a 2001 legal battle involving Northville Public Schools, said Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield Tuesday.

Maxfield was in Germany on a Fulbright Scholarship trip

when the controversy flared as the high school community installed and dedicated their sign, despite concerns raised by the Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals.

When the issue seemed to be getting out of hand, Maxfield tried contacting then-ZBA chair Randy Bruce. He was referred to the city attorney, who Maxfield said didn't return his calls.

"Finally I said enough is enough. The high school people have raised all this money. It was a good faith effort," he said.

Maxfield didn't realize Farmington Hills City Manager Steve Brock never shared with the ZBA an April letter indicating the sign would be erected, and silence meant it was taken care of, Brock said he did forward the letter to city council members.

Harrison High School Assistant Principal Dennis Noe purchased the sign knowing it didn't conform to the ZBA's desires. "In retrospect, we shouldn't have done that," Maxfield said.

Still, he said, the school community's motive was to enhance the property and provide important information.

"The sign couldn't be any smaller and still be relevant," he added. "It fits the site well. It's

an attractive way to celebrate accomplishments."

Maxfield said he talked to both Brock and Farmington Hills Mayor Nancy Bates asking if there was an appeals process. "They said the law is set up in a way that you can't appeal their (ZBA's) decision to the city council," Maxfield said.

"The only appeal is through the Oakland County Circuit Court and there's no precedent for

overturning those things."

He described jurisdiction in these matters as a "constant struggle" in Michigan and said many cities would like to have control over school construction. A bill to change that was hotly debated by state lawmakers last year, Maxfield said, but never made it into law.

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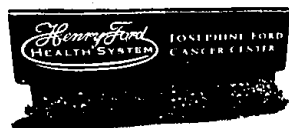
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