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(Second of four articles)
By **TIM RICHARD**
Why rewrite the Michigan Constitution when it's so easy to amend? James F. O'Neil, a man who often proposes major changes in governmental structures, sees no need to hold a new constitutional convention—although a proposal to that effect is automatically on the 1978 state ballot. "With the ease of amending, there is no need to rewrite the constitution—not after just 16 years," said O'Neil, 33, a Livonia and twice a Republican member of the State Board of Education.

Since the 1964 constitution went into effect, O'Neil said, there have been 15 proposed amendments on the ballot, and voters have approved seven and defeated eight. Among the eight rejected were two to lower the voting age to 18 (the same goal was later accomplished by amending the U.S. Constitution) and two others to allow a graduated rate income tax.

AMONG CHANGES that a Democratic Party commission is advocating are the abolition of the State Board of Education, the election of the state superintendent of public instruction and a graduated rate income tax.

"That would make education political," said O'Neil. "The state board, with staggered terms of office, has become bipartisan and remains a buffer against the political parties who at times want to dictate educational policy."

He cites the case in the mid-1960s when a Democratic state board split 4-4 on whether to hire Ira Polley as superintendent of public instruction. Under great political pressure, one

Democratic board member changed his vote to support Polley.

Another board member, Peter Oppewal, was denied re-nomination at the next Democratic State Convention because of his refusal to knuckle under to partisan pressures, O'Neil said.

AFTER POLLEY resigned, O'Neil said, a partisan board hired a pair of men who have made Michigan nationally famous.

One is Dr. John Porter, who is now also chairman of the association of state school officers. Another, Bill Pierce, went on to become a deputy for career education under the U.S. commissioner of education.

"If you went to an elected superintendent," he said, "you'd get the most political person elected—not the most capable."

An eight-member board allows perspectives from a cross-section of the state that are helpful to professional educators, he argued.

ONE CHANGE O'Neil would like to make is to elect the State Board of Education on a nonpartisan ballot, at the June election when local K-12 school board members and community college trustees are elected.

"Partisanship has hurt the board in the past," O'Neil said, again citing the Polley and Oppewal cases.

"The board can be made nonpartisan by legislative action. The present constitution only says the State Board of Education members must be nominated at party conventions and elected as provided by law. The law could be amended by the legislature to do that."

Even if partisan elections weren't



JAMES F. O'NEIL
Nonpartisan board?

eliminated, O'Neil would like to see state school officials (including the boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University) elected in June.

That way, voters could concentrate on education at all levels, with no presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, legislative and judicial issues to distract them.

O'Neil notes somewhat ruefully that state education posts, now filled in November elections, tend to be won by all Republicans or all Democrats, depending on which party is riding the tide of popularity. But under the 1908 constitution, when education posts were filled in an April election, voters often split their tickets.

O'Neil was elected to the state board once under the old constitution and a re-

lected under the present constitution in 1966. He was washed out by the 1974 Democratic tide.

IF EDUCATION campaigns were nonpartisan, how would a candidate raise enough money for a statewide campaign?

"That question is almost a grim joke to O'Neil. Education candidates used to receive no money and only some printed literature from the state party organizations. Now they receive nothing," O'Neil said. In that set of circumstances, the elections may as well be nonpartisan.

On the Democratic idea of abolishing the property tax as the mainstay of local school districts and substituting a state graduated rate income tax, O'Neil has his own proposal: "Give local school districts the option of abolishing the property tax and going to the income tax. I'd prefer to let those decisions be made at the local level. It would only take legislative action, not a constitutional amendment."

IN HIS SPARE time, O'Neil is also trying to get the ear of federal officials for some pet constitutional amendments.

One would allow the people the right of initiative and referendum in passing amendments to the U.S. Constitution. He sees much public "frustration" over the unsettled questions of school busing and the Equal Rights Amendment.

The other is to have the federal government adopt a parliamentary system. British-style, in which Congress would pick the chief executive. "This would prevent the possibility of presidential wars" (a reference to Vietnam) and with a parliamentary system you could change the government without the stigma of impeachment."

O & E brings home the gold



LANGER

Four first place awards in national and state newspaper competition recently have been presented to O'Neil & Eccentric Newspapers for outstanding achievements in the advertising field.

At the national convention of the Suburban Newspapers of America organization held in Atlanta, O&E Advertising Manager Arthur Langer was presented winning plaques in the categories of Best Classified Advertising Section and Best Special Advertising Section.

Specifically, the latter was in tribute to the O&E's 1976 Fall Fashion supplement.

Both awards were in SNA's top-rated Class IV division which comprises newspapers with a circulation of 60,000 and over.

In state competition, among members of the Michigan Press Association, the same 76 fashion section brought O&E the association's No. 1 color ad award, with the 1976 Christmas Gift Guide winning top special section honors.

Both annual contests are designed to recognize the best examples in the fields of advertising and promotion. In the case of SNA, entries in the various categories of excellence were submitted by virtually all of the nearly 800 newspapers that are members of the national trade association representing suburban and urban community publications.

Only other double winners were the Contra Costa Times of Walnut Creek, Calif., and the News Daily of Jonesboro, Ga.

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