

editorial opinion

Candidates, issues, media failed to arouse the voters

Last week's primary election is now history. The winners have grinned in their victories, the losers have frowned in defeat, and the air is full of the sounds of the political pundits noisily sucking their prognosticating thumbs.

The big story of the election is not who won and who lost, but rather with the voters themselves. It all reminds me of the old radio commercial for Popadent: I wonder where the voters went. Voter turnout was not merely light; it floated into the sky, lighter than air.

Statewide, unofficially less than one-quarter of the registered voters bothered to go to the polls, a record low for an August primary election.

THINGS WERE little better in these suburbs. Only 19 per cent of the registered voters in Avon Township turned out, leading Clerk Thelma Spencer to say, "I can't remember when a turnout has been this poor."

Farmington Hills registered a 19.5 per cent turnout (versus 42.7 per cent for the May primary), while the City of Farmington weighed in with 26 per cent (versus 49.2 per cent in May); both figures were the worst in history for both cities.

Livonia voters, despite the presence on the ticket of home townner Marvin Stempien in the 2d District congressional race, only turned out at a 22 per cent clip, fully 10 points under City Clerk Addison Bacon's prediction. Garden City (18 per cent), Southfield (27 per cent), and the City of Plymouth (25 per cent) also contributed uninspiring voter performance.

NOT SURPRISINGLY voter turnout was highest in those suburbs where a hot contest seized the minds of the people.

In Canton Township, where incumbent Supervisor Robert Greenstein lost his primary bid to Howard Stein in a hotly (and dirtily) contested campaign, voters turned out at a 35 per cent clip.

Politics in Redford Township, always volatile, produced a big race over the township clerk of office. Incumbent Ruth Sullivan survived better attacks from challengers Earl Patchett and Louise



Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER

Laurila. Voters responded with a 32 per cent turnout.

Plymouth Township has a new favorite for supervisor, local Realtor Tom Ntebaert, the race drew out 37 per cent of the registered voters.

IN LIGHT of these generally poor voter participation figures, lots of weighty generalizations are being thrown out as explanations. Watergate. Suspicion of government generally. Alienation of the electorate.

The Detroit daily newspapers called it a dull campaign, conveniently forgetting that it was their own coverage that made it that way. The local television stations went the same way. On the other hand, most candidates I talked to said they were having a terrible time getting news play.

Where it all ends up, I suspect, is that a lot of people did stay at home because they saw no reason to go out and vote. In some cases, campaigns were dull because the issue was never in doubt; in other cases, candidates failed to get their issues across to the voters; in some cases, the media did a poor job.

But where the campaigns were alive and where the issues were salient, the voters turned out. This is the way it always has been, and I suspect this is the way things are likely to be in the future.

American democracy is not dead in these suburbs, it's there, just as it always has been. All it needs is good candidates, debating the issues frankly, with adequate coverage from the media.

I just hope all three elements will perform better this fall.

In case you missed stories, your UF dollars helped again

It was easy to miss the stories, considering the news about the Colorado floods, the conventions, the murders and all. But the two announcements could well make local folks stand a little taller as well as save their lives some day.

One story was that the United Foundation for this region made a \$278,000 grant to the Southeastern Michigan Chapter of the American National Red Cross to support recent and disaster relief operations. This special grant was in addition to UF's usual annual allocation of \$2.2 million to the regional Red Cross.

IF ANYONE remembers the March 20 tornado, recall that the Red Cross helped out with disaster relief in West Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills.

Red Cross set up a service center to provide hot soup, blankets, pillows and shelter to those who needed them. It also set up a referral center to help folks get the aid they needed from other agencies.

Folks in the Bloomfield and Troy areas may recall the February ice storms and the aid center Red Cross set up in nearby Auburn Heights.

The point is that in all the talk about grants and agencies and dollars, some of that money comes back home to help us when it's needed.

THE OTHER STORY had to do with a grant the Michigan Cancer Foundation received from the federal government—\$10 million over five years.

Purpose is to help develop a coordinated system of cancer control resources, which is a fancy way

to saying we need different programs for early detection and treatment of a variety of cancers.

This was the largest program of its kind ever undertaken in a major American metropolitan area. It's happening here.

The point again is that United Foundation gives \$1 million or more annually to the Michigan Cancer Foundation. UF not only is the single biggest local contributor to the Metropolitan Detroit Cancer Control Program, but it also raises more money for cancer work than any other United Way in the country.

Put another way, while Washington can make significant grants, UF's locally raised funds provide the underpinnings for the entire project.

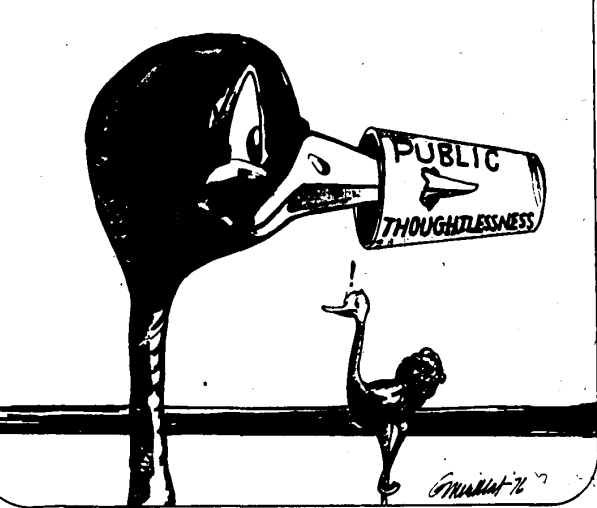
A MILLION a year for the cancer foundation. Three million and more for Red Cross disaster programs.

It's easy to forget those things in the hubbub of the news. It's easy to miss news about UF with all the other, seltzer things going on in the capital. It's easy to slip into the habit of thinking that the UF gift you made last year drifted off someplace and doesn't really help you personally.

The United Foundation Torch Drive runs from Oct. 12 through Nov. 4 in this metropolitan area. The drive "will raise operating funds for nearly 140 health and community service agencies in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties," according to the official press release.

Translate that into human terms during a tornado or the early detection of cancer, and you can see the importance of the United Foundation.

WE HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS AND SOME BAD NEWS... THIS IS THE BAD NEWS:



Zoo news: More trash, but suburban groups help

There are a couple of things new at the Detroit Zoological Park, which, as every one knows, isn't in Detroit at all but two miles north in Oakland County.

One is that the litter explosion has hit the beloved zoo. Some say the zoo's maintenance has gone to pot, but I'm more inclined to think it's part of the trend toward trashing that has infected public facilities everywhere in the past three years.

The management has placed no-littering signs everywhere, but the situation is deteriorating. Although the ostrich is a dumb-looking bird, it was pathetic to see one try to shed the Styrofoam coffee cup it had stuck its beak through.

The monkeys are smarter and ignore the corn chips and junk foods people toss them.

THE OTHER new thing is the overwhelming numbers of suburban schools and groups which are "adopting" animals by raising the cost of feeding them for a year.

Not all the persons making contributions are identified by community, but where identifications are possible, it seems that suburban groups are lining up to support the zoo by a margin of 7-1 compared to Detroiters.

Bloomfield Hills Junior High and Gallimore school of Plymouth have adopted giraffes. Borsford school of the Clarencville district, the WHW Club of Inkster and groups from Huntington Woods, Utica and Richmond have adopted aoudad monkeys.

Redford Union High School is supporting Jim-Jim the Gorilla. Channel 7 in Southfield has adopted another gorilla.

Detroit Diesel Engineering—which everyone knows is in Redford Township, not Detroit—and the Dearborn Holiday Inn are the food suppliers for monkeys.

Liamas have been adopted by Volney Smith school of Redford Township, Franklin school of Birmingham, Plymouth Cub Pack 860 and such non-metropolitan groups as Pinckney High, Owosso High and Browne Troop 131 of Saline.

Oh, there were Detroit organizations represented—Lingeman school for a crane, Region 7 Middle School for a bushbuck, Greenfield Park Elementary for Jo Mendi II and Roosevelt school for a monkey.



Tim Richard

BUT THE OVERWHELMING impression was that it was groups and businesses from all over southeast Michigan, and not Detroit groups and businesses, that were kicking in funds to help feed and preserve the animals.

Our auto licenses are issued at random, so it's impossible now to do a random plate survey to see where zoo patrons hail from.

An enlightened but unfortunately unaggressive group called Regional Citizens did a member survey on the institutions of southeast Michigan which should be considered for some kind of regional or state funding. The zoo came in second only to the Institute of Arts and ahead of the historical museums, the Detroit Symphony, Channel 56, the Science Center, Belle Isle, the Freedom Festival and suchlike.

The zoo's official history, "The First Fifty Years," published in 1974, gave this breakdown of revenues: Refectory (food stand) sales, 38 per cent; admissions, 12 per cent; taxes (no breakdown), 28 per cent; parking, the railroad and miscellaneous fees, 22 per cent.

IT'S PRETTY CLEAR suburbanites and out-staters are being smeared with a bum rap when certain politicians profess to see a "hate-Detroit" attitude here.

And it's also clear suburbanites endorse, at least implicitly, the notion that they have a responsibility to help support the zoo. For even when they're paying to feed animals, suburbanites are easing the pressure on Detroit's city budget and enabling the city to divert money into wages, which make up 68 per cent of the zoo's budget.

Now if only Detroit abandon its vicious policy of hiring "residents only."

How local folks saw Chappaquiddick

Last weekend, while we were sailing in the east, we were fogbound for a day on Martha's Vineyard. With nothing else to do, we decided to take the short, one-mile hike from the Edgartown ferry to that famous bridge on Chappaquiddick.

The short, one-mile hike is in fact more like three miles. And the bridge is not easy to find. But there were a couple of things about the physical characteristics of the place that helped us understand better what had happened.

It is not really possible for a person to mistake the ferry road for the bridge road, as has been claimed. If you are driving along the ferry road, which is paved and banked, in order to get on the bridge road, which is not paved, you have to make almost a U-turn.



Eccentricities

by HANK HOGAN

ON THE OTHER HAND, it is very easy, once you are on the bridge road, to miss the bridge and drive off the road.

The bridge road is two lanes wide, and the bridge itself is only a single-lane, plank bridge set

at an angle, so even a sober driver in broad daylight would have trouble negotiating it. There are no guardrails, so that anyone coming from the bridge at any rate of speed could end up in the drink.

What was more interesting were the comments of the natives of Chappaquiddick Island. They have their own theory about what happened on that fateful night of the Edgartown Regatta.

They claim that Teddy Kennedy was driving down the road with a girl. Later, another woman's purse was found in the car.

THEY SURMISE that Mary Jo Kopechne had fallen asleep in the back seat of the car, and neither Teddy nor the lady with him was aware of her presence. They also surmise that when his car left the road and hit the water, he did, in fact, get his companion out of the car and the two walked back two miles to the cottage where their party had been going on.

Within 50 yards of the scene of the accident, there is a cottage which, that night, had its lights on. The local people feel that no human being—no matter how ambitious for further public office—would walk away from a situation where a person could be dying and bypass the opportunity to get help.

They then surmise that the whole group attending the party realized Mary Jo was missing and

they went, en masse, back to the scene to see if she was in the submerged car.

When they were either unable to find her or get her out, they went their separate ways, not knowing what was in store for them the next morning.

This is much more logical because the story, as told over and over again by the people involved, makes the senator from Massachusetts appear to be a cold-blooded, ambitious and callous individual.

PEOPLE SAY that if the events of Chappaquiddick were to happen today, the echoes of Watergate would force complete disclosure.

There are certainly elements of coverup by the local district attorney and the friends of Teddy Kennedy.

But besides the loss of the life of a young woman, a tragedy of Chappaquiddick is that if someone in public office had been willing to tell the truth, in time the public would probably have forgiven him.

The fact that he used the influence of his office and of his family's name actually blew the situation out of proportion, damaging him far more than the actual events indicated he deserved.

However, Chappaquiddick has not hurt Teddy Kennedy in Massachusetts. He will probably be re-elected to office this fall with the biggest majority he has ever had.

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