



ZOLTAN FERENCY



SEN. WILLIAM FITZGERALD



JOHANNES SPREEN

## Dems rap tax ceiling bid

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

The latest effort to limit state spending would be in real trouble if it had to depend on support from the five Democratic gubernatorial candidates.

Only State Sen. Patrick McCullough of Dearborn, who said he is only "moving towards support," gave any indication of backing a proposed state and local tax freeze. The proposed constitutional amendment, pushed by a group called Taxpayers United for Tax Limitation, would also hold the tax level to a set percentage of the state's total personal income.

McCullough and his counterparts — Zoltan Ferency, former head of the Michigan Democratic Party and leader of the now defunct Human Rights Party; Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen, and State Sen. William Fitzgerald of Detroit — spoke last week in Livonia at a debate sponsored by the Wayne 2d District Democratic Party.

Candidate William Ralls, a former member of the Michigan Public Service Commission, did not attend. George Beng, his press secretary, took his place.

McCULLOUGH, THOUGH he stopped short of endorsing the tax limitation drive, added his voice to the growing chorus demanding a lid on government spending.

In the past decade, he said, "average personal income has gone up 140 per cent. Personal income and property taxes have gone up 300 per cent."

"The only way to set priorities is to limit revenue," McCullough said. "New tax money means new programs. In lean tax periods, it usually means higher taxes to finance those new programs," he said.

FERENCY AND FITZGERALD opposed the proposal but for very different reasons.

Ferency, the only socialist-leaning candidate in the gubernatorial pack, said, "People forget what taxes are for. Taxes mean revenue. Revenue means appropriations. Appropriations are used for state services."

The persons who would be left out in the cold if voters clamp a lid on the level of taxation would be senior citizens, the unemployed, those injured on the job, children and students, he said.

"These are the people we have to serve. How are you gonna pass a referendum every four years (to raise more money)?" he asked.

Fitzgerald, meanwhile, sided with the leaders in the state's tax revolt, but said the "tax-spend syndrome" could be solved in other ways.

The Detroit Democrat favors the "budget stability concept." Under this plan, the state would salt away a portion of its annual tax revenue in a "rainy day fund." The fund would be used to weather the roller-coaster ride of Michigan's economy.

"If anybody's lived in Michigan for the last 12 years, you know that the last thing we've got is a stable economy," Fitzgerald said.

He said the fund could be used to adequately fund needed services and avoid cutbacks and layoffs in the "lean tax periods" to which McCullough referred.

He said he also favored "sunset legislation," through which the legislature could end projects that "aren't working."

SPREEN, THE FORMER New York City cop and Detroit police commissioner, sidestepped the question, saying much of the tax spiral could be blamed on "administrative mismanagement."

"If we limit taxes, we limit what government can do," he said. "The answer lies with you and your state legislators."

Ralls of Okemos has not taken a public position on tax limitation, Beng said.

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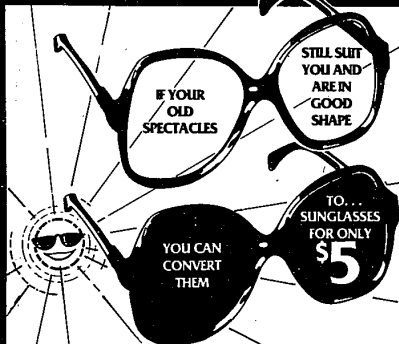
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