

Proposal A bad for communities, economy

Our mission as a community newspaper is to be the public's eyes and ears in guarding the health of the towns where we live. We judge issues not only by how they affect industry or labor or farmers, but by their impact on local schools and public services.

In that context, we must oppose Proposal A, the complex state constitutional amendment on the May 19 ballot.

However cheerful the notion of a tax cut sounds, the combination of local operating property tax cuts and an increase in the sales tax simply doesn't do a good enough job of assuring good community services.

THEORETICALLY, under Proposal A, local cities, townships, villages, school districts and community college districts are supposed to lose half their property tax revenue, and it's supposed to be reimbursed by the new sales tax money. That is supposed to be guaranteed in the constitutional amendment.

We fear, however, that because the total state budget will have to be cut \$250 million, existing state aid to schools and revenue sharing will suffer. That \$250 million state budget cut must come from somewhere, and the fact of life is that much of the state budget is aid to local units of government — in other words, our communities.

The state government, we regret to say, has a poor track record with its communities. The state finds it easy to mandate that local units perform such services as special education, vocational education and school busing. But it fails to cough up the monetary tools for the local units to perform them.

If Proposal A passes, voters who are already annoyed by the multitude of millage proposals can get ready for even more. Local officials will be asking for new millages, cheerfully assuring us the state will pick up half, and in these times of inflation, they will be seeking waivers of the 6 percent "cap" on annual property tax increases that Proposal A would impose.

NOT WISHING to be negative about Michigan's tax situation, we suggest a better way to attack the perception that property tax bills are sailing out of sight.

We are already getting property tax relief; it's called the circuit breaker. When your property tax bill gets beyond 3.5 percent of income, the state pays you back 50 percent of the excess tax.

The trouble is that most folks think it's a refund on their state income taxes. They don't recognize

Michigan's circuit breaker for the excellent tax-cutting system it is.

A congressional agency called the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations rates Michigan as having one of the most equitable tax systems in the country.

As we said, the circuit breaker system ought to be improved. As it stands, the average homeowner gets \$232 a year in circuit breaker tax relief; the average senior citizen, \$421.

But the homeowner finds the system is "back-loaded" — that is, he/she gives the state a \$232 or \$421 interest free loan and gets his/her check back from Lansing six months later. A better system would be to "front-load" the property tax so that the homeowner could deduct his/her rebate before paying his/her property tax bill.

There must be a way the Michigan Legislature could do that.

In 1978 we strongly criticized the Headlee tax limitation proposal because it contained many complex legislative details that had no place in a constitution. We also criticized the Headlee effort because it was hatched behind closed doors by a tiny group and not through the normal legislative process where it could be amended and refined.

To be consistent, we would also criticize Proposal A on the same grounds. It is long, detailed legislation, and already its opponents are finding convoluted meanings in its terms. And because it was the product of a top-level political compromise, it sailed through the Michigan Legislature in days, instead of getting weeks of fine tuning and analysis.

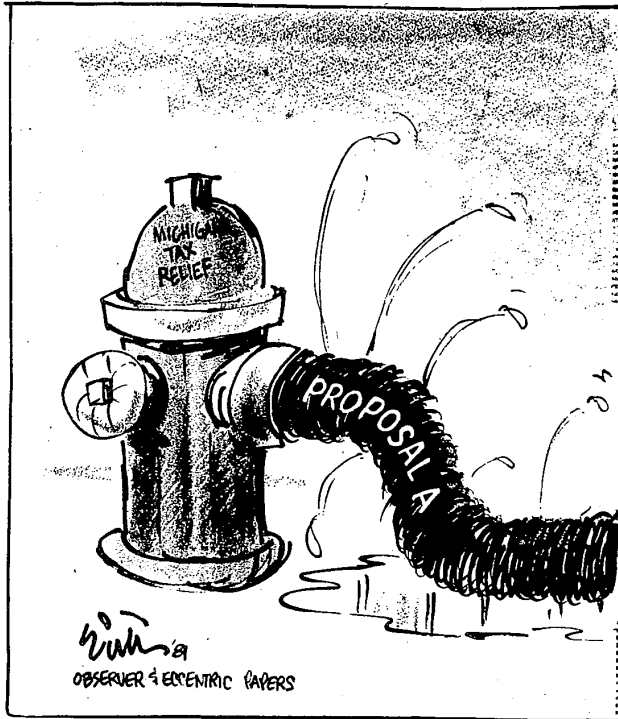
FINALLY, we note that the Michigan taxpayer sends more dollars to Washington and gets less back than in almost any other state in the Union. This economic bloodletting is aggravating our state's already anemic economy.

Proposal A would make matters worse. The property tax cuts would mean smaller deductions in our federal income tax returns. Thus, more money would go to Washington.

And the budget money cuts in Lansing would mean fewer matching state dollars to win federal grants.

Proposal A, then, would have exactly the opposite effect needed to restore Michigan's economic health. And its effects on our communities would be similarly harmful.

And so we must urge a no vote on Proposal A May 19.



Tax vote will test political system

America would be a better place if tax crusader Bob Tisch followed the example of teen-age actress/model Brooke Shields and stuck cigarettes in his ears.

That's the conclusion I came to the other day while listening to my car radio.

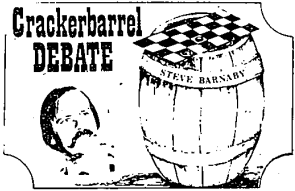
A dizzy disc jockey was mouthing off about the flap over Ms. Shields' anti-smoking advertisements. The federal government quashed the ads, saying they relayed an inappropriate image.

Apparently some bureaucrat thinks the American public will link the Republican anti-smoking campaign with prostitutes. Ms. Shields once portrayed a prostitute in a movie.

Taxpayers will have to foot a \$68,000 bill for the ads which never will be seen by the general public. Bob Tisch is the type of guy who would object to such government waste.

The hip platter spinner ended his political analysis by saying, "Well, don't forget this is the same government that brought you such things as Watergate."

I was in sympathy with the guy until he made that dumb remark about Watergate. The Health and Human Services Department might, indeed, be proud of cancelling the ad campaign, but certainly its officials can hardly be blamed for Watergate, three presidents ago.



But in reality a lot of persons are like the misguided disc jockey. They have very little understanding of government. They blame everything on "them."

THAT'S WHY the Proposal A, tax proposition probably will fail next Tuesday. The masses don't trust the officials they elect to office. Sure, local state Rep. Joe Doaks is a good guy.

It's just when he gets with the rest of those crumbies in Lansing that he can't be trusted.

In truth, the Proposal A vote will have very little to do with sales or property taxes. It will be a vote

of confidence for legislative-type government.

Sadly, it will fail. Proposal A will fail because, like the disc jockey, too many Americans use the government — whatever that means — as a scapegoat for their problems.

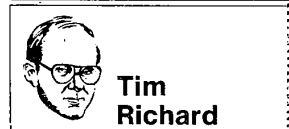
The car industry blames the government because manufacturers are unable to adequately compete against the Japanese; the oil industry blames the government for the high prices of its products, and the American consumer blames the government for the inflationary spiral caused, in part, by the escalating prices of cars and oil and by consumer borrowing.

I've never believed this tax revolt business was for real. Sure, in California a proposition went through. But folks in California will try anything once.

The overwhelming majority of states haven't passed radical tax-reduction proposals. Even in Michigan, the Headlee tax proposal barely squeaked into constitutional existence.

I'M GOING TO vote for Proposal A because I believe it to be a referendum on allowing our elected officials to do their jobs.

I predict it will fail. And next November we'll see how many suckers will make a bad situation even worse by voting for a proposal authored by a guy who would look better with cigarettes in his ears.



It takes money, engineers say

In the betting fraternity, there's an old saying that it takes money to make money. That seems to be true, too, in Michigan's efforts to rejuvenate its flaccid economy.

The buzz words in Lansing today are "high technology." Communications equipment, robotics, computers in manufacturing, electromedical products — these are the kinds of firms Michigan should attract.

But at a time when the state is cutting its budget, when university faculty people are being laid off by the hundreds, we find there is a price to be paid if we are to lure high technology firms.

THIS WORD comes from the Michigan Council of Professional Scientific and Technical Associations (MCPSTA), which includes all the major engineering and technical societies. Ronald Fredericks, an advanced development engineer for Lear Siegler Inc., writes in the Michigan State Economic Record of the group's recommendations of what it will take to attract high tech.

It will take money — spent on engineering colleges. Items:

"MCPSTA views as desirable the establishment of a High Technology Educational Council consisting of the six major public engineering schools in the state." It would provide continuing education for industry and rotate engineering school faculty into industry and senior engineers from industry to academia.

"There should be increased accountability to the legislature by each of the state's public engineering schools with respect to how these institutions are satisfying the needs of current or prospective Michigan high technology industry." Different schools should emphasize electrical, mechanical, computer, chemical or manufacturing engineering.

"A statewide, two-way higher education cable TV network could link the major engineering universities with each other and with high technology industrial sites.

"Additional funding should be granted the major engineering schools so that they may employ graduate students full time as teaching assistants at a salary level roughly 50 percent of the current wages being offered by industry to BS graduates.

"Tax credit ideas abound — for contributions to engineering schools, for documented research and development of new products, processes or systems, for expenses incurred in filing patent applications.

As the bettors say, it takes money to make money.

Softball — the aches, the pain, the joy

The warm water and soap suds soothe those aching legs. Pain seems to leave slowly as the bath water runs down the drain.

Later that night a heating pad will be placed behind a sore back as I drift off to sleep.

It's an every-spring ritual. Ah, the beginning of another softball season.

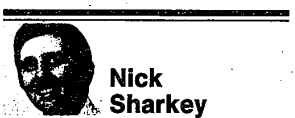
No matter how much I may prepare during the winter by trying to stay in shape through exercise, it doesn't seem to matter. After that first game of the season, it's always a fast trip to the bathtub to relieve those aching bones.

My goal this winter was to stay in such good physical condition that I could stay out of the bathtub after the first game. But it didn't happen.

I'M PART of a fast-growing cult of men and women who compete in recreational softball. I play in a league in Southfield where 2,350 men and women participate in softball games six days a week on 152 teams.

Jim Szilbgyi of Farmington Hills is the program coordinator. In addition to the current 152 teams, Szilbgyi says eight teams are new forming an Over 50 (years old) League, and four teams are starting an Over 45 League.

"We've had 60 more teams which applied but we couldn't accept because of space limitations,"



Szilbgyi said. At about 15 players per team, that's 900 additional players who couldn't get into the league. Thus, in Southfield alone more than 3,000 softballers are ready and eager to play.

Multiplying Southfield's program by many others going on throughout this area, and it's easy to understand why metropolitan Detroit is the softball capital of the United States. It's estimated that more persons play softball in this area than in any other section of the country.

OBVIOUSLY, THE joys of softball are many. Playing a game in the warm sunshine is a reminder of the simpler joys of childhood. Friendships made on the playing field are often close and long-lasting.

But the season can get long when you're still playing in the middle of August. Practices become boring. Games are inconvenient when squeezed into a busy summer family life. Sometimes, you wonder if it's all worthwhile.

That's when it's time to count the fringe benefits

of playing softball. Recently, a co-worker carefully eyed me as I took a breakfast roll out of an office vending machine. "How can you eat that and still stay so thin?" she asked.

Somewhat the aches and pains didn't seem so bad after all.



Did you know there's an organ here in Michigan which contains 75,000 pipes? It is the Frieze organ in Hill Auditorium on the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor. One of the largest organs anywhere in the nation, it was featured in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. With its 123 rows of pipes, the Frieze would cost upwards of \$1 million to duplicate today.

Did you know that underneath the city of Detroit are more than 500 miles of walkable sewers? A five-man crew spends its working hours sloshing through these tunnels looking for structural weaknesses. The city's sewers are made of brick, concrete and steel sewer drums through which more than 300 billion gallons of wastewater and storm runoff pour annually.