

Pols scurry to dance around 1 big issue

There's still 11 weeks to go but my brain is already beginning to act like the inside of a pinball machine as I contemplate the nature of the race for the presidency.

Issues? Seemingly, there is one: taxes. Everyone is scurrying to get on the right side of the issue. Trouble is most politicians have differing ideas of where the right side is.

Ex-astronaut Jack Louma, a Republican from Texas, thinks the right stuff for a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Michigan is to declare that never, never during his six-year term of office would he vote to raise taxes.

INCUMBENT Democratic senator Carl Levin's statements suggest that Louma perhaps is a space cadet who took too many walks without his space helmet on. Fritz Mondale raised the issue of taxes by claiming we have to pay the piper soon or the \$2-billion national debt is going to sink the country. President Ron, Fritz said, is secretly planning a tax raise.

President Ron, who may have taken dancing lessons from fellow former actor George Murphy (the one-time U.S. Senator from California), has done so much tap dancing around the tax issue that he makes Gene Kelley look like an amateur.

He first suggested that he would never, never have anything to do with a tax raise. Vice President George Bush asserted that never is a long time. President Ron then hedged his bet saying a president should never say never.

NOW RON's stand is that he would never raise taxes unless every other alternative including cutting every ounce of waste had been explored.

Louma acknowledges at the Dallas convention that while he would never raise taxes it is OK for a president to raise taxes, if absolutely necessary.

While all this is taking place, Gerry Ferraro scurries from one press confer-



Bob Wisler

ence to another to prove that she and her husband indeed are on the right side of their tax issue. During a five-year period, they paid 40 percent of their income to the government as taxes. That should satisfy the average stiff, but the press insists there are still questions to be answered.

Few will read the questions or explanations. There will linger over the whole situation a sense that something is wrong with the way the Ferraro-Zaccaros paid their taxes.

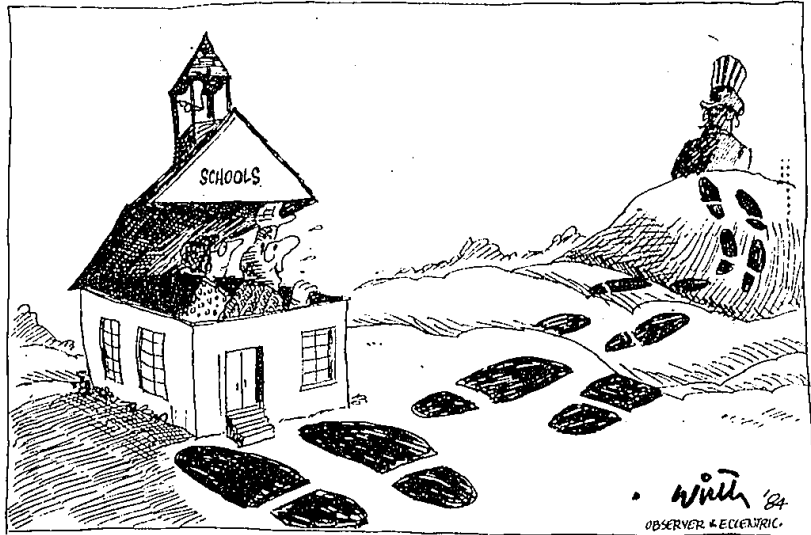
THERE WILL come a day when the taxation issue will fade but the memory will linger on. Louma will be remembered as taking the Boy Scout oath against taxation. The public will have trouble remembering where Levin is on the issue.

Voters will know in their hearts that President Ron would sooner give up his helicopter rides than raise taxes, no matter what the national deficit. They will suspect that Fritz is soft on spending to keep America strong.

In the end, the political rhetoric about taxes will not significantly influence the election. No matter how strongly the public might feel about taxes it votes for national candidates on the basis of images.

President Ron, the master pitchman, puts across the right Big Daddy image; Fritz doesn't. If Levin can carry the image of a decent, hardworking senator, voters will return him to office, no matter what his ideological leanings. Louma could do it if he can convey the image of a hard-working decent ex-astronaut, but he has a lot of ground to cover in going from space to Texas to the Senate.

He's gone — we're safe



Schools: still a risky business

Next week rusty school doors will open. After a three-month summer vacation school will be back in session.

It's time to think again of our local schools.

As you may recall two critical reports have been issued about our public school system within the past year. The most widely publicized was the national study "A Nation at Risk." That was followed up by a study conducted by the state Department of Education.

Some of the evidence cited in "A Nation at Risk" was convincing.

- Scores on standardized tests given to high school students have dropped consistently over a 20-year period.
- An average school year in this country is 180 days, while in many countries it's many more, such as Japan's 250 days.
- Most school children in the world attend classes eight hours a day, while in the United States it is six hours a day.

BOTH REPORTS recommended that local school districts act quickly to resolve a crisis in our public schools. So what changes have these critical reports brought to your local school?

Probably not much. I suspect that many school officials hope that in time the public will forget "A Nation at Risk." It's more comfortable to ignore criticism and continue with the status quo.



Nick Sharkey

Earlier this summer a reporter did a survey of several Oakland County school districts to consider the impact of "A Nation at Risk."

Two school districts — Troy and Southfield — admitted they did little to respond to the report. Troy administrators quickly prepared a letter which was sent to local residents stating that Troy either meets the recommendations in the report or they don't apply.

According to Richard Watson of Oakland Schools (the county's intermediate school district), "My interpretation — the way I read the board's reaction — is that it thought Troy already had an adequate program and (the national report) called for very little action on their part."

Southfield's Supt. Carl Hassel said he read the report but admitted he didn't ask subordinates or a citizens committee to study it.

Hassel contended that increasing the number of credits required to graduate or the number of days students must attend school is meaningless.

"The problem is not the number of days; the issue is the quality and commitment in the classroom itself," Hassel said. "You cannot get quality apart from quality people working with students."

What Hassel says sounds fine, but what does it mean? How does one measure "the quality and commitment in the classroom itself" to see if it is improving from one year to the next? Of course, that's impossible.

Some school districts are making changes. But those changes were in process before "A Nation at Risk" was issued and are not really a response to it.

For example, Birmingham is thoroughly examining its two high schools. Westland has completed long-range plans for its school district.

ATTITUDE IS important when it comes to making changes in schools. One exception to the lukewarm response to "A Nation at Risk" is Bloomfield Hills.

Supt. Fred Thorin formed a commission to study the report and it came up with 170 recommendations. They include increasing high school graduation requirements for more computer and science classes and expanding the school year from 180 to 190 days in 1988.

Thorin will recommend many of these changes to the school board next month.

But for most districts it will be business as usual when school opens next week.

Mary's fall may mar memory of Olympics

The summer Olympic Games are a matter of history now and they will be remembered for many things in the years to come. But when they are mentioned, more than likely, it won't be for the usual politics of the event, or the fact that the attendance in the Los Angeles Coliseum set an all-time record.

Neither will they be remembered for the fact that Carl Lewis won four gold medals to join the late Jesse Owens as the outstanding man in the track and field events. Neither will they be remembered for the fact that the Americans won 174 medals to set an all-time record — or the howls that went up in the boxing division over the unusual decisions that were announced or the fact that the Detroit boxers came home with two of the gold medals.

Usually, these games are remembered for the politics that is played before, during and after the last medal has been awarded.

The games this year started off on a political binge when the Russians boycotted to get even with the United States for not sending its team to Moscow four years ago.

And it may be recalled that the political factions robbed Detroit of holding the 1968 games after Detroit had been designated as the bid city. And no excuse was given.

THE LASTING MEMORY will be of Mary Decker, one of the United States' best women runners — and the idol of the spectators — laying on the infield grass after falling in the midst of the 1,500-meter run.

Every newspaper in the world ran the



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

picture of her in agony on the infield grass. And the world press was filled for days over the incident that came when Zola Budd, the English entry, became tangled with her and caused one of the biggest hassles of the games.

They'll talk about this incident for years. Mary Decker had been an odds-on favorite and was near the lead at the halfway point when the freak happening occurred.

In her statement to the press afterward, Budd told of her action. She confessed that her coach had told her to run arm against arm with the U.S. favorite, to keep her under pressure, then at about the halfway point to take the lead and keep it.

The one big mistake she made was that she decided to switch lanes too quickly. It is something that is seen on the highways of the world every hour of the day. There is nothing wrong with switching lanes — if you have enough room. More often than not the one crossing over barely misses a collision. That's what happened.

So far as The Stroller's eyes saw on television, she crossed too soon. Had it been in an automobile, the car she hit may have been a total wreck. It happens on the highways of the world amid a lot of cursing and then is forgotten.

But this one never will be forgotten. It was a human mistake, but it will always be the one view that comes to mind when the 1984 summer games are recalled.

Instead of being remembered as a gold medal winner, Mary Decker always will be known as America's Fallen Idol.

LET'S LOOK beyond the sensational headlines in the Vista case and the television footage of Charles Beckham and Darvalyn Bowers. Let us explore instead how such a case of racketeering, extortion and mail fraud came to be and how we can prevent it from happening again.

The case is really messier than it appears.

It began in the mid-1970s when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency filed suit against the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department for being "the single biggest polluter of the Detroit River."

U.S. District Judge John Feikens had a chance to make a major reform by appointing a receiver for the plant or looking to some new method of governance for the department, which serves about 100 communities in southeastern Michigan.

Feikens blew it. He made the wrong decision by 180 degrees. Instead of appointing outside management, and moving toward a regional authority, the judge appointed Mayor Coleman Young as a kind of super-administrator for the plant, giving Young extraordinary powers and not requiring him to deal with the Detroit Council.

FEIKENS' DECISION amounted to "putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop," in the words of a colleague.

The majority of Feikens' blunder was further obscured when the Michigan United Conservation Clubs gave the judge an environmentalist award for his handling



Tim Richard

of the case.

We turn now to Bowers and Beckham. Bowers was a great friend of Mayor Young's. Feeding her Vista Disposal wouldn't get the contract to haul sludge from the Detroit sewage treatment plant, she paid off Beckham, then director of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. The federal prosecutors said Beckham did other things to help Bowers. To quote from the news reports:

"Beckham approved changing the contract from two to three years after the document had been signed by Young. It took 7 1/2 months before the city water commissioners and finance department were notified."

WE NOW SEE why good local government charters require a governing board to approve major contracts. Council approval won't guarantee clean government, but it will increase the chances that someone may spot a flaw or raise a pointed question about a particular personality or blow the whistle in some way.

was to grant Young extraordinary powers to run the sewage treatment plant.

It also shows how wrong Wayne County Executive William Lucas is in seeking a charter amendment to strip the County Commission of its powers to approve contracts. Voters should refuse to sign Lucas' petitions and should be wary of electing commissioners too friendly to the county executive.

TWO OTHER lessons are obvious:

- Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn should be supported in his suit to recover damages from Detroit in its handling of the sewage treatment plant affair. We as customers paid for the operation of that plant.

- The Michigan Legislature should turn a deaf ear to the idiotic charges of racism and pass state Sen. Rick Fessler's bills to set up a truly representative governing board for the water and sewerage system, one in which the people who pay the bills have the votes and the oversight authority. Fessler, R-Union Lake, has taken an ungodly amount of abuse from Detroiters for attempting to correct Feikens' blunder.

"A water and sewerage utility serving 100 communities should not be operated by a single community. Some of us have been saying so for years. The stench from the Vista case should fetch the lesson to everyone."