

# Opinion

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## The proposals C has savage fishhooks in its bait

**P**ROPOSAL C on the Nov. 6 ballot contains tempting bait: the allure of rolling back the 1983 personal income tax hike and of sending a message to the Establishment in Lansing. Never mind that we elected the Establishment. Never mind that voters sent shock waves through Lansing by recalling two state senators. Never mind that 60 percent of the tax increase already has been rolled back, and that the rest will be rolled back when our fiscal house is in order. Backers of Proposal C obviously have touched a responsive chord by pointing to ineptness in the state capital. The question now becomes how much damage their medicine will do.

**UNDERNEATH THE JULY BAIT**, Proposal C has some savage fishhooks.

• Governing boards would need 80 percent "super majorities" to raise such fees as college tuitions, building permits, dog licenses, swimming pool admissions, library fines, registration charges. On an eight-member board, seven votes would be needed for passage. With one member typically absent, one demagogic board member could hold up the entire plan. Yes, the plan could be put before the voters for approval — and can you imagine having a statewide referendum on lifting the physics lab fee for Northern Michigan University? Proposal C would make a farce of both republicanism and democracy.

• Michigan's tradition of municipal home rule and local self-government would be grossly violated. Proposal C would amend city charters and arbitrarily change the rules for other units of government by freezing property tax rates — even if charters and voters had authorized higher rates.

For example, if a city charter set a 10-mill property tax limit and the council levied only eight mills, Proposal C would amend the charter by freezing the rate at eight mills. About half of our suburban

cities and charter townships and many school districts would have their business tampered with by Proposal C.

• Michigan's roads and bridges are just being put back in shape, after a decade of deterioration, thanks to a 1982 increase in gasoline and weight taxes. These increases were tolerable because our newer cars are lighter and burn less fuel and generate less revenue. Good roads are essential to industry, tourism, commerce, our own personal safety and comfort. Proposal C would halt this critically necessary program in its tracks.

• Proposal C probably would invalidate \$357 million in unemployment compensation taxes which are needed to pay back funds advanced to Michigan by the federal government during the recession. Without a repayment plan, Michigan would be subject to federal penalties. So it's true — Proposal C would make Michigan "the credit deadbeat of America."

**BACKERS OF Proposal C** have pointed correctly — to state spending on welfare and prisons. Their dream is that cutting taxes will reduce spending on welfare and prisons.

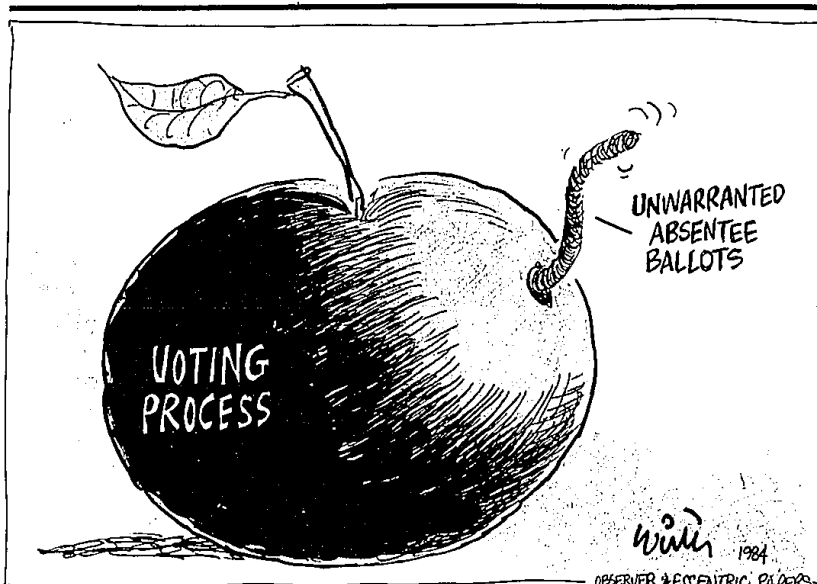
Their tactic will backfire. The budgeting process first takes care of social services (which are governed by the welfare caseload and Medicaid prices charged by the health care industry), followed by prisons and the courts.

What will suffer? Aid to education first; school districts will bang on the door for more property taxes; colleges will raise tuitions — or try to. Cities next — and there goes some police protection and library hours.

Then property tax rebates, which return nearly \$600 million to two-thirds of the state's households. State police — to the delight of speed demons and drunk drivers. Conservation officers — to the delight of deer poachers. The toxic waste cleanup program — to the delight of polluters.

Proposal C should be defeated.

— Observer & Eccentric Newspapers



## State is ripe for vote fraud

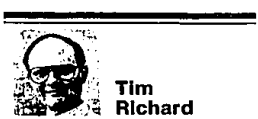
To buy a \$5 piece of merchandise with a plastic credit card, you frequently have to show a couple of pieces of identification, with a picture, and wait around while the clerk runs a check on your card.

But to vote — well, it's getting easier and easier in Michigan. We are used to laughing at Chicago and Cook County, Ill., where people listed on gravestones who gave addresses as empty lots cast ballots. My guess is that sooner, rather than later, the same thing will happen in Michigan.

It's significant that major portions of the political parties' campaign budgets are going not into advertising, pamphlets and travel expenses for candidates, but into voter registration drives. Clearly the politicians aren't waiting for dutiful citizens to stroll down to city or township hall to register. Voter registration in itself is a political tactic.

**REPUBLICANS AND Democrats** are distributing absentee ballot applications like crazy. One difference is that the Republican Party also plans to act as the collecting agent for AV applications — picking them up and returning them to the proper authorities.

That immediately creates the suspicion they will return only those of persons they know to be favorable to their cause and possibly lose certain other ones. They've been warned against this practice by the Secretary of State's office.



Tim Richard

Detroit is using all kinds of unpaid deputy clerks to scour the town and register voters. Churches and self-styled "community group" activists have the power of government to enlist voters. The scary result is that, despite Michigan's declining population, a record voter turnout is predicted for Nov. 6, 1984.

**SECRETARY OF State Richard Austin** is registering voters at the time they obtain driver's licenses and forwarding the registrations to city and township clerks. Unfortunately, some addresses are box numbers and post office addresses. A single post office may serve four townships in three counties.

Which clerk gets the registration card? Often the wrong one. And while the clerks make corrections, they still have a mess to deal with.

Austin, a man who shamelessly uses his offices and mail to promote himself, is undaunted by the criticism. He likes the idea of registering voters through his department.

But one has to wonder how a voter feels when he has registered through the Department of State and shows up at the polls only to find the local clerk hasn't received the form from Lansing yet.

**STATE ELECTIONS Director Chris Thomas** warns that you are not entitled to an absentee ballot just for the asking. You must have a legal reason — age, health or being out of town on election day.

In practice, Thomas is dead wrong. To avoid three-hour waits in line on election day, many voters tell a little lie and say they're going to be out of town so they can qualify for an AV ballot. In some affluent suburbs, we have noted, the AV vote runs 30 to 35 percent.

One suspects that the issuance of AV ballots is so loose that a possibility for mischief exists.

Michigan law is so liberal that a voter can be "inactive" for 10 years and not be dropped from the registration rolls. Across the United States, the average length of time for cancelling the registration of an inactive voter is two years.

A voter of our acquaintance decided to change her lifestyle and her signature. When she signs in to vote, no one compares her new signature to the signature on her voter registration card. She is appalled at the casual folksiness of it all.

This state is ripe for a major Chicago-style voting scandal.

## Land getting scarce; B would save it

**ORDINARILY**, WE frown on earmarking taxes for a particular purpose. But when the Michigan Legislature itself frankly confesses it can't keep its hands off the state land trust fund, it is an extraordinary occasion which demands our attention.

The Legislature created the land trust fund in 1976 by law during the Pigeon River Country State Forest oil drilling controversy. Since then it has raided the fund five times for other purposes.

So repentant Legislature has placed Proposal B on the Nov. 6 ballot as a constitutional amendment to earmark revenues from oil and natural gas leases on state lands. These revenues will go into a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund which will be capped at \$200 million.

Interest earned on the \$200 million will be used to fund proposals by state, regional, county and local officials. A list of current proposals is in today's news columns. A board will administer the fund.

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund would be used:

- 75 percent to buy land for recreation, environmental importance and scenic beauty.
- 25 percent to develop facilities on the land.

**WE ENDORSE Proposal B**, although we have no way of knowing whether the fund will be sufficient. It's clear that next to nothing will be done unless such a fund is created and constitutionally protected.

Land isn't getting any scarcer. And particularly in southern Michigan, it isn't getting any cheaper. Once land is privately "developed," it is gone from public use, usually forever.

In many states, great tracts of natural beauty are fenced off and studded with "no trespassing" signs by owners who enjoy them only a few weeks of the year. Moreover, the so-called "sagebrush rebellion" has targeted much federal land in the west. If Michigan is to avoid a fenced-in fate, we will have to do it by state action — the sooner, the better.

**IN OUR travels** throughout the state, the editors note, sadly, that many state parks and historic sites are looking a bit shabby. They need renovations. And we would have better access to them if the rutted interior roads were resurfaced.

Proposal B is good public policy, far-sighted environmental thinking and this generation's obligation to the future. It should be adopted.

## No good case for 'A'

**P**ROPOSAL A is an attempt to fix something that isn't broken, and there is no strong argument for adopting it.

Placed on the ballot by the state Legislature, Proposal A would amend the constitution to give a Joint Committee on Legislative Rules year-around power to review administrative rules and regulations.

The Legislature already has that power. First, the state constitution (Art. IV, Sec. 37) empowers "a joint committee of the Legislature, acting between sessions, to

suspend any rule or regulation promulgated by an administrative agency . . . Second, a state law gives the joint committee the same power during sessions of the Legislature.

Because of a federal court ruling affecting the U.S. Congress, Michigan lawmakers became nervous about their own powers to review rules. There is, however, no reason to fear that that precedent will apply to Michigan.

Moreover, Proposal A's backers have given us no solid evidence that a mere committee ought to be elevated to constitutional status.

## Club's walls fall for Moms

**IN THE HISTORY** of mankind, it will not merit a chapter, not even a sentence. But a few weeks ago, another discriminatory barrier fell when women were admitted to an all-male organization.

No, it was not the much-publicized Jaycees. I'm talking about the athletic boosters club of our children's suburban school. Boosters often run a school's sports program. They hire coaches, buy uniforms and hold numerous fund-raisers to pay the bills. Most of the Booster Clubs I've known have been all-male.

Women usually joined the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), which is directed at the academic side of schools. It says something about sex stereotyping that adult women joined the PTO while adult men become Boosters.

All-male school athletic clubs ignore the fact that there are just as many female as male athletes today. Girls' basketball, volleyball and softball attract as many participants as football, boys' basketball and baseball.

**FATHERS OF girl athletes** argue they can represent their daughters. But Father doesn't know what it's like to be a little girl. Only Mom knows that.

In my children's school, mothers have helped the Boosters for years. They've sold hot dogs and pop. They've cleaned up after parties. Sometimes, they've even been invited to attend a Booster meeting



Nick Sharkey

— If they received an award or coached a team. But never have they been asked to join the club.

This strange to me. So last spring I asked at a meeting, "Why don't we have any women members?" A club officer told me that women could become members, but none had ever asked to join (forget that men are usually recruited). A few men laughed.

In late September, one mother decided she would join the Boosters.

She called several other mothers. Many were too busy with their own careers or clubs. But two others agreed to go with her.

They were gathering in the parking lot before the meeting when I saw them. I said hello and started to walk in. The ringleader yelled, "What's the matter? You afraid to walk in with us?"

**I TURNED** on my heels and said, "No, I'm not afraid." All four of us walked into the meeting together.

The women walked over to a small card table and sat down. I resisted the impulse to sit down with a buddy and sat down with them. Quietly and without fanfare, they had broken an all-male barrier.

The meeting went smoothly. The women did come in for some good-natured teasing. At one point, the president asked if members had any questions on the budget. A hand shot up in the back of the room. "I'd like to know why the women are here," he asked. All the men laughed. The women had nervous grins.

One woman spoke several times during the meeting. The other two said nothing. One later confessed she had been too frightened to speak.

**AFTER THE** meeting, beer and pop were served, and everyone began to socialize. The three women remained. They talked to several men and seemed to enjoy themselves. They volunteered to work on several committees.

After a few minutes, it was time for me to go home. As I looked back, I could see the women continuing to talk to the men.

A few days later, I asked one of the women what she thought of the meeting. "I enjoyed it. I'll be back," she said with a smile.

Some of my heroes are never seen on television.