

Opinion

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ELECTION ENDORSEMENTS

More of the same Keep incumbents Dolan, Faxon, Harris in office

THEY'RE HEARING footsteps and looking over their shoulders. That's as it should be for officeholders running for re-election.

No incumbent should go unchallenged in a general election — and we're glad that won't be the case in three important races in the Farmington area.

It's only through the give and take of honest, clean campaigning, candidate forums, debates and so forth that voters can come to know the candidates and their ideas, and thus make intelligent choices on election day.

We're endorsing incumbents in all three races. We like the challengers and their ideas. We're happy they ran and we hope to hear from them again. But, in our view, the incumbents seem more experienced and more knowledgeable about the districts and their problems.

Our endorsements:

47TH DISTRICT COURT JUDGESHIP

WITH CERTAIN reservations, we endorse Judge Frederick L. Harris in his bid for a six-year term on the bench of the 47th District Court in Farmington.

Harris, who was picked by the governor to replace retiring Judge Michael Hand in the spring of 1989, has attracted some vocal detractors since his appointment.

Judge Harris was insensitive, critics claim, in replacing two court employees with people of his choosing.

But most of the problems people say they have with Harris seem to be highly personal — not professional. No one is saying that Fred Harris isn't doing his job as a judge in the 47th District Court.

We mentioned reservations.

We think that Harris should listen to what his detractors are saying. He should then consider his conduct in the courthouse, its offices and hallways to see if these personal criticisms really apply to him.

If the answer is yes, he should try to stop doing whatever it is that offends — immediately. A judge always should work hard to make the public feel comfortable with the judicial branch of government.

With just a bit of image-polishing, we feel Judge Harris can do this.

STATE SENATE — 15TH DISTRICT

AGAIN WE support the incumbent... again with reservations.

It would be difficult to replace Sen. Jack Faxon were he to be voted out Tuesday. The colorful Farmington Hills Democrat has built a tremendous power base in his 26 years in public life.

If the state slips into economic decline, the residents of the 15th District will need that power. He knows his way around state government. He can get things done for his district.

Faxon has a special interest in education (he's a former teacher and now owns a private school) and he's open-minded enough to look at some new ideas, such as schools of choice.

Faxon seems to stay in touch. He's in the district a lot and seems to work well with local officials on various projects. The citizens usually have his ear.

The reservations?

Well, it's just a feeling that perhaps Sen. Faxon has gotten a bit too comfortable with his power base and his large group of supporters. So often incumbents lose when they get too comfortable.

Faxon — who has been criticized as having too much style and not enough substance — needs to keep looking at the tough issues in his district and plugging away at them.

STATE HOUSE — 69TH DISTRICT

THERE SEEM to be many similarities between the Republican incumbent and her Democrat challenger. For example, they're both pro-choice on the abortion issue and they both see the need for right-to-die legislation.

But experience in local government along with class and grit make Jan Dolan our choice for re-election in the 69th District.

Dolan, with service both in the State House and before that on the Farmington Hills City Council, has shown herself to be a caring, decent woman.

As we've said before in endorsing her, Jan Dolan doesn't buckle to demands of the moment. She has no hidden agenda (although she did once attempt to hide her true age) and she is tough enough to fend off the lobbyists.

The people of the 69th District are fortunate to have a woman like Jan Dolan to represent them.



Media must do more to raise voter turnout

NEXT TUESDAY is election day.

In a day or two we will be inundated with well-intentioned urgings to get out and vote, together with observations about democratic elections being the basis of our democratic freedoms. All true, of course.

At the same time, odds are that voter turnout will be very low. This is nothing new; voter turnout falls every election. At the same time, there is something very troubling about electing governors, state representatives and judges when less than half of those eligible actually vote.

There's a contradiction here: the value we profess for voting versus the reality of low voter turnout.

THERE IS NO better illustration of this contradiction than the results of a poll of attitudes toward judicial elections as reported in last week's issue of Inside Michigan Politics, a useful and informative newsletter published by Bill Ballenger.

The first question asked 800 voters how much they felt they knew about candidates for judge and what the candidates stood for. Only 3 percent felt they knew a great deal, and another 19 percent thought they knew a fair amount. More than half (57 percent) said they knew "very little," and one voter of every five (21 percent) admitted knowing "nothing at all" about candidates for the bench.

These findings certainly confirm the widespread suspicion of vast ignorance of the various candidates for Michigan judicial offices locally (circuit, district and probate judges) and statewide (Court of Appeals and Supreme Court).

The second question asked whether, given the fact that most knew very little about judicial candidates, it would be better to appoint judges. The answer: a resounding

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"No." Sixty-four percent favored election, 30 percent preferred appointment, and 4 percent preferred some combination of appointment and election.

THIS IS A strange and contradictory result. What can explain it?

Simple. Even though voters realize they know little about who is running, they don't want to turn over the power to select judges to the political establishment, be it the governor, the Legislature, the courts or the State Bar Association.

Look at the detail. Excepting people who vote straight Republican (and who can be expected to view appointment by Democratic Gov. Blanchard as a bad idea), the groups most strongly favoring continued election in ignorance were those at the fringes of our political system. They included lower-income blue collar workers, those not married but with children, and those whose family income was less than \$10,000.

BUT I THINK there is something more.

For one thing, I sense a profound distrust of the way the political establishment works. A big majority of people admit they know almost nothing about judicial candidates. But they don't want anybody else's hand on the election process. Governors



Philip Power

and legislatures and courts may be tolerable in the abstract, but people seem to be saying they don't want them meddling with their right to direct election.

In reporting widespread ignorance, the data also portray a profound failure of the news media to do their jobs in covering the non-glamorous but profoundly important political contests for offices like judge.

It's easy and fun to report on the sexy races like governor and senator. But how much coverage did you see on TV, hear on the radio or read in the big daily papers about judicial races and qualifications of the candidates? Not much. I'm even disatisfied with the local coverage this newspaper has provided.

It's hard to say it, but I think it's true. In practice, we in the news media have abdicated our professional responsibility to report on the daily grind of politics at all levels to the easy-to-prepare but next-to-useless voters guides and summary wrap-up stories.

So the next time you run into a self-satisfied editor or reporter blaming the politicians for the mess we're in, just ask them how much coverage they devoted to the race for local district judge.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

Broomfield again Retain powerful congressman

VOTERS IN the 18th Congressional District have a tough decision to make when casting ballots for their Washington representative. But when weighing all factors it would be best if they vote for Republican incumbent William Broomfield.

Broomfield is a hard working, dedicated representative, a Washington insider who has chalked up 34 years in office.

Broomfield visibly enjoys what he does. He has been responsive to community and business leaders. He promptly answers mail and telephone requests. And, he wields power as the ranking minority member of the strategic House Foreign Affairs Committee.

He also is one of the few members of Congress who is fiscally responsible — a hard boast to make in today's Washington scene.

And we are particularly pleased that he has become more independent of the executive branch of government over the past two years.

BUT DEMOCRAT OPONENT Walter Briggs IV, a fresh, young, progressive voice, is a force to watch in the future.

The 33-year-old accountant has some ideas that Broomfield would be wise to adopt — particularly on the issues of women's choice, child care legislation and accessibility to the public.

And, should Briggs lose, he has no plans to close his campaign office as he gears up for the 1992 election.

As we have told Broomfield in elections past, his voting record doesn't reflect what we think a majority of his Oakland County constituents believe.

Our area has changed over the years Broomfield has held office. We are more ethnically diverse; we have more families where both parents work or just a single parent heads the family; and we continue to count on government to allow

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women to make their own decision on whether or not to have a child.

Broomfield is against cutting the defense budget. He voted no every step of the way as Congress sought to resolve the budget crisis because he felt spending should have been frozen without raising taxes. He voted against raising the minimum wage and against the child care bill to help parents of limited means obtain day care for their children.

He voted in favor of protecting the flag by a Constitutional amendment and against the family leave and the most recent civil rights bill.

He has consistently voted against federal funding of abortions, except in cases where the mother's life is endangered or rape or incest. But he emphasizes that the pro-life forces do not endorse him.

AND WHILE MANY in his district agree with Broomfield on these issues, he should be more open to listening to alternative ideas from his constituents.

We call on Broomfield to do more than respond to the usual invitations from the network of service clubs and business chambers. Holding his own town meetings or opening himself up to a League of Women Voters-sponsored debate next time around will both give him a chance to woo a new set of voters and to hear their concerns.

Broomfield still has the energy and desire to represent the 18th Congressional District. With Briggs and redistricting waiting in the wings, we'll be watching to see how this venerable congressman performs.

from our readers

Moffitt calls editorial a disservice

To the editor:

Your brief and unexplained editorial suggestion (Oct. 29) that the incumbent 15th District County Commissioner has been "less than effective" and endorsing the third-time Democratic challenger for the position does your readers a profound disservice.

"Effective" is popularly defined as "having an effect" or "producing a desired result."

In county government, effectiveness is measured not by individual legislative achievement, particularly in a legislative body dominated by one political party, but in one's contributions to the collective deliberations of the body as a whole.

Had inquiry only been made during the brief interview upon which the editorial endorsement was

based, a consistent record of specific contributions to the board would have been available for substantive examination by your readers.

As recently as August, the board of commissioners adopted my resolution to develop a policy for candidate screening, selection criteria and terms of appointment for deputy medical examiners.

Earlier this year, the board adopted my resolution calling upon MDOT to erect the promised noise barriers along recently completed I-696 in certain residential areas in the city of Farmington Hills.

As a practicing attorney, many of my contributions to the board's effectiveness stem from legal analysis of contracts, legislation and law enforcement issues.

Less than a year ago the board unanimously adopted 13 separate amendments I proposed on the board floor to the critical contract between Oakland County and Auburn Hills for the siting of a waste-to-energy facility and material recovery facility. The adopted provisions had been overlooked by the county's outside-specialist solid waste counsel.

More letters — See Page 19A

Your editorial responds "Enough of that" to my suggestion that, to the average citizen, county government is an "opaque, slow moving river." Your editorial nowhere mentions my individual efforts to make county government less "opaque" to its citizens, including privately printing and distributing four times a year 16,000 county government newsletters, and authorship of columns in a competing area newspaper and in political periodicals.

Reasonable minds can plainly differ on subjective candidate evaluations. The Civic Searchlight rated my candidacy "Preferred and Well Qualified," its highest rating.

Thank you for the opportunity to present these unwritten, important aspects of the race.

David Moffitt
County Commissioner
15th District

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

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Judith Doner Berne assistant managing editor
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