

points of view

Durant's ad gave substance to campaign

THE LEGAL industry raised its collective eyebrow and dropped its jaw in shock when Clark Durant campaigned for the state Supreme Court.

His TV ad began with a pistol firing two shots, cut to a woman struggling with a man, then showed her running through the house, screaming for help. It ended with a closeup of a knife in the air.

Durant's radio ad featured the voice of a woman, apparently the crime victim, saying, "I don't trust them. They aren't for a victim. They're for the criminal."

"They" meant the Supreme Court. Some of Durant's brothers and sisters at the bar thought the ads too graphic.

I suspect that what shocked the legal industry most, however, was that Durant's campaign had substance.

NEVER HAS had Michigan seen an appellate court campaign that actually discussed cases.

There are canons of judicial ethics that say a candidate for the bench isn't supposed to make promises or discuss pending cases. Fine. We don't want a jurist to prejudge a case by pandering to a mob.

But the result has been generations of bland campaigns in which judges don their black robes, stare with expressionless eyes and promise to uphold the law firmly but fairly, without fear or favor, blah, blah, blah.

And the poor voter, as pointed out months ago, falls into a pattern of



Tim Richard

voting for Irish names. In the late campaign, Justice Michael Cavanagh didn't show his face at public forums, to my knowledge.

BUT NOTHING prevents a candidate from discussing cases already decided. The high court justices' opinions are published and open for review by the voters.

Durant did precisely that. A Re-

publican convention nominee, he zeroed in on incumbent Cavanagh, a Democratic nominee. He let Cavanagh's running mate, Justice Patricia Boyle, off the hook.

Durant did us a favor. He showed there were real differences between Cavanagh and himself.

In real life, Cavanagh and Justice Dennis Archer constitute a two-man extreme left wing on the Supreme Court. Their decisions tend to be pro-criminal defendant and pro-labor, as I've pointed out in a number of cases. They dress it up in erudite legal niceties, but they're still pro-defendant and pro-labor.

In the case Durant discussed, he even pointed out that candidate Boyle voted the other way.

This is not to say the two leftists

are bad. They are different from the other five, and you deserved to know it.

Sad to say, Durant's campaign didn't make a difference. The Irish names won, philosophy be damned.

IN THE CASE Durant discussed, the high court vacated a sentence of 100 to 200 years — the so-called "basketball score" sentence — in a second-degree murder case. The justices sent the case back for resentencing.

The bad guy then got 50 to 100 years. In an interview, Durant said it meant the defendant would be out in 25.

His ads left the unfortunate impression the guy got off completely.

Not so. The bad guy is still in the slammer.

Durant's ad wasn't in the same category of "negative political ads" as outgoing Gov. James Blanchard's. The governor got personal, wrongly bashing his rival's attendance record, raising questions about his tax returns, and giving the wrong impression about his rival's position on property taxes.

Durant stuck to a basic issue. Let us hope Durant's loss doesn't mean an end to substantive court campaigns. We voters should get a thorough discussion of basic issues, whether we want it or not.

Tim Richard writes regularly on the local implications of state and regional issues.

Teachers reject Blanchard, give Engler boost

Q: It's well known that teachers and school administrators are politically active and vote. From what I understand Jim Blanchard was always supported by educators, especially the Michigan Education Association. Did Blanchard lose the support of educators in this last election? And now that John Engler is in office, will a different relationship exist between the governor's office and the Michigan Education Association?

A: Yes, a different relationship will exist between the governor's office and the Michigan Education Association. The MEA had access to Blanchard's office, but probably won't with John Engler.

The MEA gave about \$300,000 to the Blanchard campaign; zero to Engler. John Engler owes nothing to the MEA.



Doc Doyle

But it's probably not pay back time. The MEA has supported several Republican legislatures who have made education a priority.

The Republican Senate is balanced by the Democratic house. So Engler will eventually be affected by the politics of education.

"Did Blanchard lose the vote of educators in this election?" With no evidence to prove it, I believe he lost many MEA voters who historically voted for him and also many AFT

(American Federation of Teachers) teachers who work in Detroit and live in the suburbs.

Why? Blanchard's "Robin Hood" (recapture) bill which took millions away from the more solvent school districts and put it into less solvent districts lost him votes.

Many solvent districts went after more millage to maintain their programs.

Many MEA and AFT members live in suburban communities that lost money. They also saw their tax bills increased.

MEA and AFT teachers are taxpayers and the notion of Blanchard playing Robin Hood with their wallets influenced their vote.

School superintendents and boards who became victims of the Robin Hood bill were adamant. Believing the scenario unconstitutional, they

opted for a change in governor.

Some educators in needy districts who benefited from getting money from wealthy districts see this gesture as tokenism. It didn't solve longstanding problems.

The educator community, including MEA members who knew little

about Engler had enough of Blanchard.

A very few teachers, former Blanchard followers, talked much about the election and some said publicly they were not going to vote the party MEA line.

Does this send a message to the

MEA that teachers are as concerned about the taxes they're paying as the salaries their leaders negotiate for?

A changing of the guard in the governor's office and a much more Republican and conservative Michigan Board of Education will be interesting to follow.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to

help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

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