

POINTS OF VIEW

AAUW's forum helps voters make informed choices

The American Association of University Women has always occupied a warm place in my heart. My late mother was an early member, and through her I formed the impression that if there was something important to be done, the AAUW was likely involved in doing it.

So it was with a lift to my step that I went over to the Livonia city hall last Thursday to participate in a taped question and answer session for all statewide education candidates, sponsored by (who else?) the Livonia Branch of the AAUW.

Unusually informed readers may remember that I am a candidate this year for re-election to the University of Michigan Board of Regents. So, in addition to being alert for any hint of bias that might slip into this column, readers should realize that I am writing from direct personal experience.

Running for something like the Board of Regents (or for the Board of Governors of MSU, Trustees of Wayne State University or members

of the State Board of Education) has been problematic ever since the present Michigan Constitution was adopted back in 1963.

Before that, Michigan held education elections in April in odd-numbered years. Statewide education boards, local school boards and various local millage and bonding proposals were all on the ballot at a time when educational issues were not competing for attention with elections for president, U.S. Congress, governor, the state Legislature and so forth. This meant that the news media had enough time to get focused on the issues and, accordingly, the voters were reasonably well-informed.

But today's state Constitution lumps everybody into November elections in even-numbered years. With so many races to cover, the news media lack the resources to report on and to scrutinize the records and views of education candidates. The result? Voters lack confidence in voting knowledgeably in such races, as



PHILIP POWER

demonstrated by the very large fall-off in vote from governor to state education candidates.

So we education candidates mill around in relative anonymity, faintly hopeful that somebody might notice who we are, what we are running for, even what positions we stand for.

This is too bad. Education boards like the U-M Regents have an enormous (and mostly hidden) impact on the state. They pick presidents, set tuition rates and allocate money for

financial aid. They help define policies for their universities, from setting admissions standards to designing ways to move discoveries from labs into high-tech, spin-off companies.

And there are significant differences between the candidates on these and other issues, as well as sharp disparities in experience and qualifications.

Some years ago, I suggested that the Michigan Press Association sponsor what amounts to an education meet market, inviting all the statewide candidates to one place to allow easy poking and convenient prodding by reporters and editorial writers. For whatever reason, MPA turned down the idea.

Enter the good people at the Livonia branch of the AAUW. Beginning in 1996, they offered to tape education candidates responding to questions and to bicycle the tapes around the state to be aired on the public access channels of local cable televi-

sion systems. They did so again last week.

Three out of four major party candidates for U-M Regent showed up. Sitting under the hot TV lights, we tried to answer the questions put to us by Yvonne Constans, the moderator. The questions were tough but fair. And anyone who looks at the half-hour program will find it easy to make an informed choice on the ballot — we appear under "State Boards," just below candidates for state Legislature — on Nov. 3.

To find out when the program is being aired, just call your local cable television provider.

Phil Power is chairman of Home-Town Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@cconline.com

Plenty of our candidates are misspeaking themselves lately

Geoffrey Fieger is in deserved hot water for a remark in which he juxtaposed "Jesus" and "goofball" in the same sentence. But the Democratic gubernatorial nominee is not the only candidate misspeaking these days.

Jennifer Granholm, Fieger's running mate as attorney general, held a Lansing press conference Sept. 15 to promote a crime bill and said:

"Criminals and big corporations have lots of lawyers."

How's that for a Jesus-goofball remark? Lumping our job providers, as the chamber of commerce likes to call them, with the dope dealers and scam artists.

Her point was that she wants to represent the little people, the consumers and fraud victims. That hardly justifies lumping criminals and big

corporations. Juxtaposing "criminals and big corporations" still goes over in what a columnist friend calls "the People's Republic of Ann Arbor." Elsewhere in Michigan, folks feel the need to be polite to business entrepreneurs, at least. Remember the issue of Michigan's business climate?

How would you feel if you are, say, a middle manager at Ford Motor Co. and a member of the attorney general's staff is checking out a discrimination complaint on behalf of the Civil Rights Commission? Would you be confident that you and your company, whether wrong or right, would get fair treatment?

Besides, few criminal defendants can afford to hire fancy lawyers. Most defendants are indigent and ask for court-appointed attorneys.



TIM RICHARD

Next we have state Rep. Mary Lou Parks, Fieger's running mate for secretary of state. The incumbent secretary of state, Candice Miller, says her office has fined Parks "thousands of dollars" for late filing of her campaign expense reports.

Parks responded to my question on the Sept. 27 "Spotlight" program on Channel 7. See if you can follow Parks' blame-shifting logic:

"Isn't that very nice to say? I serve as a legislator, and yet she doesn't know me, and yet she can charge me. That speaks to what I've been talking about. She should have been able to work out the mechanics and make sure that the campaign finance law is ready to be workable."

In other words, Parks says the reason she was fined was that Miller doesn't know her and isn't enforcing the law properly.

Candidates often make minor mistakes in filing. When that happens, they simply make a correction, with a short note of apology, and don't need to be fined. But being late, often, is more serious.

Fieger himself is still the ranking "not yet novice" when it comes to high school civics. Back in May, some journalistic brethren asked him about the

sales and income taxes. A reporter asked how his tax-cut attitude would go over with the Michigan Education Association, the teachers' union that is a big player in the Democratic Party.

"I'm gonna make sure the lottery dollars really go to education," said Fieger. "They do," said a reporter. Fieger scoffed.

I remarked at the time that Fieger would need to imitate Jesus' miracle of feeding 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes in order to pay an \$11 billion public school bill with \$600 million in lottery revenue.

I should have added: "Geoffrey Fieger is no Jesus."

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Tough-Tone voice mail number is (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

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