

A status report on the race to be Michigan's governor

With the August primary election just four months off, now's a pretty good time to take a look at what's happened so far in the race for the governorship.

Politically attuned readers with long memories will recall this contest is the first in a decade without a sitting governor on the ballot. Congressman Jim Blanchard was first elected governor in 1982, winning again in 1986. Gov. John Engler won an upset victory over Blanchard in 1990 and went on to win two more elections before being term limited out of office this year.

In notable lock step, the institutional Republican Party has anointed Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus as Engler's designated successor, notwithstanding the fact that his campaign has so far obtained so



Phil Power

little traction that he's far behind both Blanchard and Attorney General Jennifer Granholm in head-to-head polls and only runs even with U.S. Rep. David Bonior.

Posthumus is a nice guy and, as Engler's understudy, he certainly knows his way around Lansing.

But he pales in the shadow of his giant patron without so far having had much success in carving out any singularity of appeal. Several months ago he spoke for a couple of hours with a group of editors from these newspapers; most were unimpressed, some were bored.

Running against Posthumus in the primary is John H. ("Doc") Schwarz, also a term limited state senator from Battle Creek. Schwarz's problem is hardly singularity of appeal. A straight-talking, full-blown moderate in a party that has moved steadily to the right ever since the days of Bill Milliken, Schwarz's strategy is to keep hanging around until even dyed-in-the-wool GOP functionaries realize that Posthumus has no chance of beating any of the possible Democratic nominees.

Most of the sound and fury has been confined to the Democratic primary, where Blanchard, Bonior and Granholm are so far running far ahead of state Sen. Alma Smith, who is able, experienced and so far has not succeeded in attracting the attention of a jaded Lansing press corps.

With high name ID stemming from his years as governor (especially among Democratic women in Detroit, who make up a big bloc among primary voters), Blanchard jumped into the race with a

big lead in the early polls. But Granholm has used her office to get her name into the headlines and raised a ton of money, notably with the help of Emily's List, a national organization that contributes to women candidates.

Most Democratic insiders have been torn between their loyalty to Blanchard (who befriended many and appointed some while governor) and their conviction that Granholm would be by far the stronger candidate in November. (Even Blanchard is worried about what Republican attack ads on TV would do with his decision to raise the state income tax during a budget crisis in his first term.)

A couple of polls last month put Granholm ahead of Blanchard, but a new one published last week in Inside Michigan Politics put the two essentially neck and neck.

The same poll put Bonior far behind, but neither Blanchard nor Granholm should dismiss the former minority whip in Congress. Bonior is smart, tough and a good campaigner. Whether he can find a way to break out of his limited base in Macomb County and his embrace by the UAW leadership remains to be seen.

Over the past month, I've been reading with steadily growing admiration two biographies of former President Theodore Roosevelt by Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* and *Theodore Rex*. Roosevelt was an extraordinary figure in American politics: smart, very widely read, with an amazingly varied background for a politician — rancher, hunter, soldier, ornithologist, conservationist. Most important, to me at least, was his ability to cut to the heart of problems and respond with far-reaching and creative solutions that broke the molds of conventional thinking.

If these are the standards by which the current crop of candidates should be rated, provisional evidence in the campaign so far suggests Granholm and Schwarz deserve close attention.

Undeniably charismatic, Granholm has so far on the campaign trail been relatively opaque in her approach to public policy. But those who know her well say that she's like Teddy Roosevelt in her ability to get quickly to the heart of a problem and to find unconventional solutions. Schwarz, on the other hand, reminds me of T.R. in his courage and straight talk to a party rigidly locked in an ideological strait jacket.

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Paul Pace

Nature is truly unkind.

That's all I kept thinking about when I was invited to join the Farmington Hills Fire Department Monday in a controlled burn of a house that is set to be demolished.

Fire has no care where it starts, who it hurts or how much damage it causes, it just seems to want to grow and destroy.

During my experience, several of the home's rooms were specifically torched using different methods. It was done so the department can later train people from all over the state to be fire investigators.

The home will be inspected this week to test about 30 people who signed up for the class. Inspector Mike Kish told me. Their training will question their ability to uncover a fire's origin and cause, from a burning cigarette to a malfunctioning electrical appliance.

Upon first inspection, the house was set up to look like a regular home, complete with all the little knick-knacks a home usually contains. I was told that firefighters bring in things that make the home look lived in.

Lt. Michael Garr helped me suit up and actually witness one of the burns up close and personal while in another room. I got in the boots, overalls, jacket, helmet, the oxygen tank on my back and a mask on my face. It felt like I was walking in a space suit.

Once the fire was raging on in one of the rooms, Garr told me to kneel so I could at least have some vision as black smoke quickly filled the outside room. My body was surrounded by the protective gear up to 500 degrees, but I could still feel the room temperature change. Garr told me to take off my glove and feel the difference in temperature as I held my hand up and then down. The higher my hand went, the warmer it felt. The only thing I could see was the smoke and the flames licking out of the room, and the sounds of crackling destruction.

I was amazed to walk out of the house after being in the smoke-filled room for maybe 10 minutes and be covered in soot.

Reporter gets first-hand look at raging fire

I guess I never thought about it, but I quickly learned squelching a fire is pretty much a strategy where safety for the firefighter has to be a priority. It's not as simple as dousing the flames.

Looking at other rooms, it's amazing how smoke ruined the rest of the house that had no doors.

Keeping doors closed, I learned, is the best way to keep fire and smoke contained.

So what do firefighters do when they can't see anything because a room is filled with smoke? Only the touch method works when going from room to room. A new camera that captures body heat on the screen is also a way to see if someone is in a room filled with smoke.

Garr gave me some background on how firefighters do their jobs, from putting on the gear, to signing in with the commander who controls the situation and keeps track of which firefighter is doing what.

I guess I never thought about it, but I quickly learned squelching a fire is pretty much a strategy where safety for the firefighter has to be a priority. It's not as simple as dousing the flames.

Garr told me later that he can't tell people enough to have working smoke detectors in their homes and for families to have an escape plan in place where everyone meets in the same spot so no one is left wondering whether a family member is still inside a burning house.

Thanks to the Hills firefighters and especially Lt. Garr for allowing me a personal view of what it's like (at least a little) to be a firefighter.

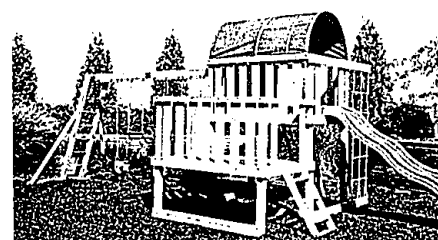
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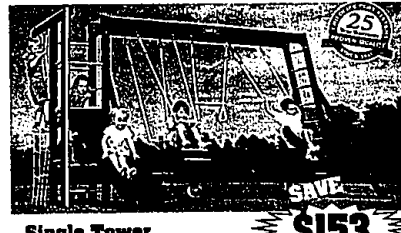
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