

# The story that's behind November's Proposal 4

On the surface, Proposal 4 — a 1,400-word constitutional amendment that will be on the statewide November ballot — makes no sense.

If passed, it would redirect 90 percent of the \$325 million Michigan receives annually from the national tobacco settlement to hospitals, nursing homes, anti-smoking programs and prescription drug programs for seniors. The losers would include the 45,000 high school students each year who get \$2,500 college scholarships from the Michigan Merit Award program and the Life Sciences Corridor, the state's main effort to jump-start the biotech industry.

If passed, the amendment — to be labeled Proposal 02-4 on the ballot — would utterly bypass the normal appropriations process by which public funds are expended in Michigan and lock into the Constitution a rigid formula that would allocate the money to the various beneficiaries. In response, Roger Martin, a spokesman for Citizens for a Healthy Michigan, the group pushing the proposal, argued on public TV last week that "you can't always trust politicians" to make good decisions. That's no doubt true, but it's a whole lot easier to undo bad appropriations decisions than it is to remove a mistake written into the Constitution itself.

If passed, the money allocated under Proposal 4 would go mostly to private outfits that operate free from legislative or media oversight. Spending tobacco settlement money on health programs might be OK, but I think letting nonpublic groups spend public money free from public scrutiny goes way too far.

If passed, Proposal 4 would even give around \$3 million a year to something called the Healthy Michigan Foundation, which didn't even exist when the proposal was originally drafted!

Even with all these surface defects, the folks behind Proposal 4 paid a firm to get 476,000 signatures to put the measure on the ballot. At between \$2-\$3 for each signature, that comes to nearly \$1.5 million. And I understand they've budgeted several millions more in TV advertising before the Nov. 5 election day. That's big money.

How come? Two reasons mainly, a compound of the good and the greedy.

For the good, consider the thought that tobacco settlement money properly ought to be spent getting people to quit smoking or persuading kids not to start on curing folks who get smoking-related illnesses. That's a perfectly

reasonable position, and it's one the proponents of Proposal 4 will allege is their sole motivation.

As to the greedy, consider this history. Michigan hospitals have been complaining for years — justly, so far as I can tell — that they are getting screwed on below-cost Medicaid reimbursements. Earlier this year, the legislature passed a bill that would have hiked the Medicaid money Michigan gets from the feds so

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as to give state hospitals an extra \$157 million. Legislative leaders thought they had made a good faith effort to bail out the hospitals, but the Michigan Hospital Association wanted more. It enlisted a bunch of other medical organizations to help launch the petition drive to get Proposal 4 on the ballot.

I'm told that things came to a head in June on Mackinac Island, when Gov. Engler and Budget Director Don Glimmer met with Spencer Johnson, the head of the Michigan Hospital Association. As I understand it, Engler and Glimmer went back to Lansing under the impression that Johnson had agreed he was not going to file the signatures as long as hospitals were going to get their extra \$157 million. But Johnson and others pressured the hospital association board to file, which eventually it did.

Feeling (mildly put) double crossed, Engler promptly vetoed the \$157 million Medicaid bill. And the state wound up in (failed) litigation trying to stop Proposal 4 from ever getting on the ballot. And now you can confidently expect a blizzard of harmless-sounding TV ads advocating Proposal 4 as good public policy.

Opponents are led by former Attorney General Frank J. Kelley, who was an original filer of the suit against the tobacco companies and calls Proposal 4 an attempt to "steal from the state treasury," and state Sen. Joe Schwarz, himself a physician who says it "makes a travesty out of our state constitution."

As far as I'm concerned, Proposal 4 makes even less sense under examination than it makes on the surface.

Phil Power is the Chairman of the Board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2206 or at ppower@homecomm.net.



Joni Hubred

# Remember how America recovered after 9/11

Truth is, I've never found much common ground with term-limited state Rep. Andrew Ruczkowski.

He's a Republican. I'm not. He believes he can beat incumbent U.S. Senator Carl Levin. I...well, you get the idea. But at the Farmington Area Jaycees' 9/11 candle-light vigil, Rocky said something that hit home with me.

While everyone else talked about remembering the terrorist attacks and loss of life on Sept. 11, 2001, he suggested we all remember Sept. 12. That day began America's long journey back, as people poured into American Red Cross donation centers and dropped their hard-earned money into envelopes and collection boxes.

Sept. 12, 2001, marked the beginning of a spiritual awakening as men, women and children by the thousands flocked to houses of worship, reaffirming their faith in their Higher Power.

As people rose that morning, they did so with the burden of sorrow and a sense of determination. Our hearts were heavy; our eyes glistening with tears. Still, so many emergency services workers flocked to New York City to help that some were turned away.

Not millions but billions of dollars were donated toward rescue efforts and to provide survivors with some measure of comfort.

If Sept. 11 marked the death of innocence, Sept. 12 commemorates the re-birth of hope.

If Sept. 11 showed us the depths to which humanity can sink, the darkest, coldest heart of mankind, the angels of Sept. 12 lit the sky with a radiant goodness and the warmth of compassion.

Rocky urged us all to carry that spirit forward

by promising to give at least one hour every week to a community organization. Sure, it's easy to write a check, and there's no question charitable causes need financial support.

More importantly, however, local groups need

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Countless civic organizations in our communities would be delighted to accept your helping hand. The Jaycees, for instance, couldn't have staged such a moving and meaningful event without many local folks who were willing to share their time and talents.

The shortage of volunteers has always existed, even before the disasters that befell our nation and set us on the path to war. The scope of the tragedy on 9/11 only made that need more visible.

Last fall, we all had a compelling reason to give. We sought an outlet for our grief and rage. In the face of abject fear, we found comfort and reassurance in a common cause and the strength that comes in numbers.

Now that the smoke has cleared, it's a little more difficult to see why it's important to give of ourselves. And so the spirit of Sept. 12 lies not in discovering charity in our hearts, but in remembering it.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments at 3341 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; by phone, (248) 477-5450; by FAX (248) 477-9722; or Email, jhubred@oe.homecomm.net

## LETTERS

### Prop A ain't broke

I read the front page article by Joni Hubred in the 9/12 issue of the Observer, titled, *House candidates diverge on issues*. It was about a debate recently between Valerie Knol and Aldo Vagnozzi on issues, one of them being Proposal A, which Knol favors and Vagnozzi does not.

According to the story, Mr. Vagnozzi said he doesn't believe Proposal A has done much to reduce taxes in Farmington/Farmington Hills.

I'm sorry Mr. Vagnozzi, but you're dead wrong on that issue. And I'm surprised to hear you said that. All homeowners in Farmington and Farmington Hills are not rich, Mr.

Vagnozzi, and those of us who are not rich, understand and know the value of Proposal A, which has kept our property taxes affordable by limiting annual increases to five percent maximum or the Consumer Price Index, whichever is lower. Proposal A has been in effect since March 15, 1999.

The old adage holds true, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This is going to cost you my vote in November, Mr. Vagnozzi. I supported you in the August primary but you can kiss my support goodbye now.

Kenneth Kemp  
Farmington Hills

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