

Candidates avoid most important state issue

With only three weeks to go to election day, the candidates for governor, Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus and Attorney General Jennifer Granholm, have so far clashed mainly around social issues.

Posthumus wants to restrict a woman's access to abortion in all cases except to save the mother's life; Granholm is "100 percent pro choice." On welfare reform, Granholm says job training and family support will lead to economic self-sufficiency, while Posthumus says welfare recipients should be drug tested and argues there should be "no free lunch."

Granholm endorses a Vermont law that lets gay couples enter civil unions and supports extending health benefits to partners of gay state employees; Posthumus opposes both. Posthumus charges Granholm comes from a corrupt Wayne County/Detroit political culture, while Granholm implies Posthumus isn't interested in being governor or much more of Michigan than Kent and Ottawa counties.

Granholm supports using race as a criterion for admission to colleges and universities, while Posthumus opposes "affirmative action." Although it's hard to see how the issue affects public policy in Michigan, Posthumus opposes reparations for descendants of slaves, while Granholm supports various social policies designed to undo historic discrimination without "writing checks."

At the end of their largely unenlightening debate last week, Posthumus charged Granholm with pandering to liberal interest groups like the NAACP and concluded that Granholm doesn't share the values of "Michigan's working families."

Granholm charged that Posthumus was pandering to his conservative Right To Life base and suggested he was out of step with most ordinary Michigan citizens.

What's fascinating about all this is the enormous disconnect between what both campaigns are saying (or slinging, in the case of all the TV attack ads) and what by all means is the central public policy issue in Michigan: The state of the economy and the budget crisis that will immediately confront whomever is elected governor.

A survey taken by the Marketing Resource Group in September indicated that 87 percent of likely voters consider their top concerns, in order, are: the economy, job security, education and health care. Social issues don't even make it into the top four.

Ever since this summer, when the Citizens Research Council's careful study of our state budget concluded we face a "structural deficit" of at least \$1 billion starting in fiscal 2004, everybody who knows anything about the man-

agement of state government and finances has realized there is basically no other issue of consequence facing our state.

But you wouldn't recognize it by listening to Posthumus, who sounds a bit like the old Alfred E. Neuman character who kept repeating, "What, me worry?" The Lieutenant Governor, who ought to shoulder at least some responsibility for the dire financial situation the state faces, keeps saying there's no budget crisis. Cut spending, he chants, maintain the income and single business tax rollbacks and trust my experience. That's absurd on the face of it, and a candidate as experienced as Posthumus knows it.

To the degree that she discusses it, Granholm does a bit better. Her proposals include a 5 percent cut in state government spending and, as she said in the debate, she "doesn't want" to increase taxes. At least she recognizes there is a budget crisis looming and is responsible

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enough to realize that something serious has to be done about it.

So how come two bright, experienced candidates are essentially ignoring the issue that all the experts say is crucial and the polls say is uppermost in the minds of most voters?

To talk about the state's budget situation is to edge toward talking candidly about tax revenue (regarded by politicians as always fatal) and discussing budget priorities in detail (regarded by politicians as a mixture of the harmful and the boring).

Far better, say the handlers, to talk about social issues. Resorting to the choir consolidates and motivates "the base" without having to get into embarrassing specifics. As Posthumus' conservative base is by and large defined by social ideology and support for tax cuts, he stands to gain by framing the campaign in this way.

Whether this framing will turn out to appeal to independent voters — now a majority in Michigan — and, especially, to women is very probably another matter.

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.

LETTERS

Improve traffic

I applaud David Judge for his persistent efforts to get Farmington to enforce the posted speed limit of 25 miles per hour on city streets.

I, too, have heard the Farmington Safety Director cite the Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County belief regarding traffic speed. Lack of manpower to enforce traffic speeds has also been cited.

The TIAOC belief allows the Farmington Safety Director to justify the "do nothing" approach to enforcement of traffic speeds. This is deplorable. It is a severe injustice to the residents of Farmington.

Our city is charmingly built, with sidewalks to use and many great destinations to walk including parks and shops and schools. We are unique compared to many other suburban communities who do not have sidewalks or destinations within walking distance.

These features make Farmington a desirable place to live. It also puts the community members at risk because we do walk, bike ride, catch the bus and push strollers on these very streets where the traffic is allowed to flow at a high rate of speed.

Farmington's philosophy makes it look good to motorists from all around who choose routes through, instead of around Farmington, because of the traffic environment we have created. The residents of Farmington are clearly the losers in this situation.

Marilyn Welmar
Farmington

Festival response

I am pleased to know that Ms. Knie has enjoyed so much enjoyment from attending the Founder's Festival.

My point was that they are not in themselves enough to sustain the kind of expenditure this event requires, and that it might be time to attempt to appeal to a broader audience, one that might bring the revenue that downtown merchants sorely need.

In answer to Ms. Morrison's letter which I assumed was directed at me, I believe that as a resident of the Farmington-Farmington Hills area for 15 years I have a right to state my opinion on public events held here, whether I have volunteered for them or not.

You'll be glad to know, however, that I HAVE volunteered for the festival, and the glimpse I got into the way some things are administered in part prompts my criticism.

Scott Stevenson
Farmington

Support Rogers

On Nov. 5 there is an election for the open Oakland County Commission in the newly cre-

ated 14th District (roughly Eight to 14 Mile, Haggerty to Farmington Roads, and includes the City of Farmington).

Many challenges involving road maintenance and improvement, upgrading the storm sewer system, budget allocation and planning for future growth and maturation of the district will face the next commissioner. It is crucial this decision be made by matching the backgrounds of the candidate and the job requirements that the person will be expected to perform.

Mike Rogers is educated in construction and civil engineering, holds current employment with the Road Commission performing planning and project management, has vast experience in handling massive project budgets and first hand knowledge of the county budget process. Mike also serves on the Planning Commission for the City of Farmington Hills.

With all these strengths and skills to offer, Mike Rogers is the wise and logical choice for Commissioner of the 14th District.

Nancy Bates, Mayor

Farmington Hills

William Costick, former City Manager

Farmington Hills

Limited out

The reasoning behind term limits is to remove politicians before they can get too comfortable at the government trough. Ideally, new people with fresh ideas will seize the opportunity to replace them.

Aldo Vagnozzi, 77, worked for a union before going into a lifetime of politics. His campaign motto, "Experience, experience, and experience," should disqualify him. The State Representative office is vacant because Rocky Raczkowski, 33, state House majority floor leader, law degree, and captain in the U.S. Army reserve has too much experience. He was "limited out."

Valerie Knol, 32, is a manager at Johnson Controls in Plymouth. Her critics claim she is young and inexperienced, but these are the desirable qualifications under current rules. She appears knowledgeable, eager to serve and could prove the term limits concept is more than politicians playing musical chairs.

Hank Borgman

Farmington

Prefers Valerie

I watched our State Representative Candidates in debating action recently.

I was impressed by Valerie Knol's clear mind and sound thinking. For representing us in Lansing and elsewhere, I prefer Valerie, and urge readers to vote for her.

John Hubbard

Farmington Hills

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