

Again, something triumphed over nothing in the election

Both parties might consider how last week's election results can be summed up in one simple sentence: You can't beat something with nothing.

Nationally, the Democrats lost big time. They figured that the combination of a faltering economy and the usual mid-term election trend against the party in power relieved them of the obligation to produce anything specific, clear or compelling to show the voters. The Democratic message was fuzzy at best, flabby at worst; as a result, Democratic voter turnout was weak, especially with white and moderate voters.

By contrast, the Republicans benefited from the national patriotic response to 9/11 terrorism and conveniently timed war talk about Iraq. But they also managed to make the Democrats look either confused or obstructionist on the Bush tax cut, on homeland security and appointments to federal judgeships. Contrasting President Bush's magisterial arrivals on Air Force One with the miscellaneous Democratic talking heads only heightened the mismatch.

In a blizzard of polling data over the past several weeks, one poll stands out. Published in the New York Times, it indicated that people by a large margin felt that the Democrats had no clear message for the American people while the Republican positions were far more precisely etched.

In Michigan, I submit, it was still you can't beat something with nothing, but here it was the Democrats who benefited.

Carl Levin, who won his fifth term in the U.S. Senate, was never going to be seriously challenged by a nothing, state Sen. Andrew ("Rocky") Raczkowski. Moreover, Levin had a solid, detailed record of leadership going for him, and his clearly stated position on Iraq — that we simply cannot afford to be unilateral if we are really going to go after Saddam Hussein — only magnified his substance.

In the race for governor, "something" turned out to be the undeniable charisma of Jennifer Granholm, by all odds the most attractive Michigan Democratic personality since Soapy Williams' heyday. She played it safe. She wasn't particularly specific during the campaign — who would, sitting on such a big lead much of the time? And she didn't make any glaring mistakes.

Beyond all this, the most important Granholm "something" was that she isn't John Engler. In looks, in personality, in relative abrasiveness, in perceived partisanship, in instinct for the jugular. The unstated but fundamental political message for the Granholm campaign was: It's time for a change, and there's a real dif-

ference between John Engler and me. That was a "something" the Posthumus campaign never really overcame.

It was never going to be easy. Somehow, Dick Posthumus had to figure out how to position himself as Engler's chosen successor but without his hard edge (and high negative poll ratings). So initially he talked amiably — but pointedly — about his Michigan roots and values and his experience in state government. That never cut much ice, mostly because it expressed an attitude rather than conveying a program. And an attitude is only part way to "something."

Then, seeing persistently low polls and deciding to go into attack mode, Posthumus (or his handlers) sought to find hard content by choosing to inject what can only be understood as race-baiting into the campaign. The TV ads about Kwame Kilpatrick, Wayne County-style politics and so forth possessed a certain kind of nasty emotion that attracted the attention of viewers saturated with political advertising clutter. And just possibly they could have set the stage for a follow-up demonstrating how Posthumus would change things for the better. But it never came.

Suburban and moderate voters looking for a substantive reason to select Posthumus never found one, while maligned Detroit voters were merely angry. Once again, something triumphed over nothing.

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) 953-2047 or at ppower@homecom.net.



Joni Hubred

Two different charitable events give us all something to shout about

The very best part about Farmington and Madison Heights has to be the way people come together for a good cause.

On Saturday night, hundreds turned out for two events focused almost entirely on the needs of children here and in places far away. And they accomplished their fund-raising goals in different ways.

Quite different, in fact. At Bostch Corp., men and women decked out in elegant evening attire gathered at the black-tie-optional-but-you'd-better-dress-up Cornucopia Ball, which benefits the Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation.

Elegant tables set up in the hallway displayed silent auction items, which included pricey memorabilia, designer sunglasses, works by talented local artists, vacation packages and sports tickets to accommodate even the most discerning Detroit fan. Conversation buzzed as bidders dashed from one end to the other, keeping an eye on items they'd targeted.

It was like eBay, only with pens. Highlighting the evening's activities — aside from bidding on live auction items like flags from the U.S. and state capitols and a ride on a Farmington Hills fire truck — was a unique "bell" fund-raiser. An anonymous donor promised to match up to \$5,000 donated that evening, and every time someone turned in a pledge, Foundation trustee Dr. Mark Jensen rang a bell.

Dining continued through dinner, which featured shrimp, oysters on the half-shell, tenderloin, maple-roasted turkey and a perfectly cooked salmon, served by friendly wait staff.

This event was so classy, they even piped mashed potato ribbons into champagne glasses.

The point of the evening was to make events like it obsolete, or at least to change the focus from fund-raising to recognition. The foundation has been working over the past year to establish an endowment, an investment so large it can provide grants from the interest income it generates.

Whether that's possible in these difficult economic times is anyone's guess, but if these volunteers fail, it won't be for lack of effort.

If I have one suggestion, it's that they find a way to goose up the entertainment, but my view may have been swayed a little later in the evening.

Don't get me wrong, Sheila Lands and Top

Drawer provided excellent dance music, which My Best Friend (who was a terrific sport about all this) and I thoroughly enjoyed before it was time to zip across town to the second half of our Saturday night double feature.

I couldn't help thinking as we walked in on the floor show at Princess Madiha's 11th Annual Dance Benefit for St. Jude's Children's Hospital that the Cornucopia Ball could really benefit from a little more, well, energy.

Of course, we weren't just at another location. Clearly, this was another universe.

As we walked in, a dancer with a candelabra on her head stood in the spacious entrance hall at Farmington Hills Manor. The banquet room was packed and the atmosphere was charged with conversation and laughter. As we had sampled the Cornucopia menu, we turned down an offer of the delicious Middle Eastern fare that I know is part and parcel of this exciting evening.

Fine food, friendship and fancy dancing — Madiha Bishara wouldn't have it any other way.

Grateful for the health of her own children, she has been touched for more than a decade by the plight of those who need the help of St. Jude's Hospital. Founded more than 50 years ago, St. Jude's houses a state-of-the-art research and treatment facility for children with life-threatening illnesses. More than that, the hospital cares for families, ensuring their only concern is the health and well-being of their sick child.

Madiha and her growing army of volunteers work tirelessly to organize this annual event, which is nothing short of spectacular. Every year, the floor show features talented dancers and lively, Middle Eastern music. And the costumes, well, they really have to be seen to be appreciated.

What struck me most about this evening was the vast difference between two events that accomplished the same goal: Allowing those who have resources an opportunity to help those in need and, at the same time, celebrate the spirit of giving.

In a world with too little good news, that's something to shout about.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer. She welcomes your comments at 3341 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; by phone, (248) 477-5452; by fax, (248) 477-9722; or via email, jhubred@oe.homecom.net.

Read all your favorites online at observerandeccentric.com

Holiday Season begins at the Village!

Join Us for...

the First Annual Community Tree Lighting, Friday, November 22nd at 7pm

Fountain Park in the Village

Santa's Arrival, Saturday, November 23rd at 9am

Main Street in the Village

the VILLAGE OF ROCHESTER HILLS

Shopping made simple.

Walton Blvd. and Adams Road

www.villageofrochesterhills.com