

# FISCAL AWARENESS SERVICE

#22



DR. GERALD FAVERMAN, Chairman of the Board

## A LETTER OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

May 9, 1985

MEMO TO: Clients and Interested Parties

SUBJECT: EMERGENCE OF WILLIAM LUCAS, REPUBLICAN

FROM: Gerald A. Faverman and Richard K. Giecek

Wayne County Executive William Lucas on May 8th changed his party allegiance and vested his political future with the Republican Party. If he does not seek the 1986 GOP gubernatorial nomination, virtually every political observer in the state will be surprised; a formal announcement will wait until January or February of 1986, after a period of assessment and evaluation. Mr. Lucas could become the nation's first elected Black governor and thereby become a major figure in American politics. Already, as Chief Executive of Wayne County, he governs over a population greater than that of 16 states of the union.

Who is this new and potentially vital new political figure? He was born in Harlem 57 years ago to immigrant parents from the West Indies. Mr. Lucas, orphaned in his early teens after the untimely death of his parents within a year of each other, went to live with his aunt in the Bronx. Subsequently he was awarded a track scholarship to Manhattan College. After graduation, he worked briefly as a teacher and as a welfare caseworker. He then joined the New York Police Department, where he spent the next nine years as a police officer. He continued his efforts for self-improvement and advancement, attending Fordham University's law school from which he received his law degree, while continuing his full-time employment with the Department.

In 1962, at his law school commencement, Mr. Lucas, serving as an escort for the then-U.S. Attorney General of the United States Robert Kennedy, met and attracted the Attorney General's attention. Several months later, he accepted an invitation by the Justice Department to join its staff to investigate voting rights violations. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Lucas became an FBI agent and was stationed in Washington, D.C., and then Cincinnati. In 1966, he was transferred to Detroit. Mr. Lucas left the FBI in 1968 to become the Wayne County Undersheriff, ascending to Sheriff in 1969 when Sheriff Roman S. Gribbs was elected Detroit's Mayor. After 20 years in law enforcement activities, he made the switch to management and administration in 1982, having been elected Wayne County Executive under a broad and comprehensive new charter.

No one can be sure how Mr. Lucas will play his political cards. While he most likely will run for governor in 1986, he has other options. He might seek reelection as County Executive next year on the Republican ticket, building support for a future senatorial or gubernatorial bid. He might receive a federal appointment from the Reagan-Bush administration. He has already been mentioned as a potential replacement for FBI director William

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Webster. Mr. Lucas has become a major media figure and candidate without firing a shot. His has been the most intensely reported noncampaign in recent memory. His every move is being reported by Michigan's print and television reporters and increasingly by the national media as well.

Mr. Lucas has adroitly exploited media and party attention. He has had personal meetings with President Reagan and Vice President Bush and was even provided a conspicuous seat at the President's State of the Union address in January. He has been courted and welcomed to the Republican Party by Vice President Bush and former Governors Romney and Milliken, former gubernatorial candidate Richard Headlee, national committeeman Peter Secchia, Senate Majority Leader John Engler, state party chairman Spencer Abraham and a host of other party officials. Mr. Lucas has attained near celebrity status without significant scrutiny or attack. Published polls show him to be one of the state's most popular political figures, if not the most popular. One wonders as he becomes the cynosure of all eyes how he will fare in a very tough league where charity or forgiveness are seldom present.

Societal polarization, the decline of labor as a major political force, national economic decline, and a major shift of philosophical viewpoints are changing the political balance in America. Republican chances of winning the governorship have improved with the emergence, since 1980, of a stronger Michigan Republican party. The Michigan Republican party, well organized, well financed, and focused toward winning, is more flexible, more ideologically compromising, and more open to change than most Democrats are willing to admit. The GOP now claims the allegiance of the same number of Michigan voters as the Democratic party--quite a dramatic change, if true--from the 1970s, when voters identifying themselves as Democrats outnumbered Republicans by nearly two to one at times.

As evidenced by Richard Headlee's showing outside of Wayne County in the 1982 governor's race, Jack Lousma's surprisingly strong showing in the U.S. Senate race in 1984, and President Reagan's landslide win, a conservative Republican could win a gubernatorial election in Michigan if marketed astutely. In fact, as discussed in our political letter of October 1, 1984, the state may be gravitating toward majority status for a coalition of blue-collar Democrats and traditionally conservative Republicans. There are signs that the GOP is becoming a popular party at parity with the Democrats after more than a generation of minority status. Republicans George Romney and William Milliken entered each of their gubernatorial races facing a Democratic margin of from 15 to 25% and thus had to fashion liberal-independent coalitions to win and retain public office. Their victories turned out to be personal rather than party victories.

One of Mr. Lucas's major advantages, should he choose to run for governor next year, will be the national political attention he receives. Since spending for both primary and general elections are legally capped, the free Time, Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, and network television coverage of his activities could be worth millions in his attempt to win the primary and challenge Governor James Blanchard. Mr. Lucas must survive a GOP primary first, however, and observers do not discount the difficulties of latent racism, anti-Detroit feeling, and the penalties for moderation in a highly charged Republican primary where conservative voters have historically had great influence.

In 1982, Lt. Governor James Brickley found the adversarial coalition of Mr. Headlee, L. Brooks Patterson, and Senator Jack Welborn too much to overcome. Mr. Lucas may be faced with challenges from former State Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas Brennan, Oakland Executive Daniel Murphy, and perhaps the seasoned and very dangerous warrior, Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson. If Mr. Lucas can persevere and the next 12 months of testing and assessment indicate that a gubernatorial race is winnable, then we see him attempting to fashion a coalition less conservative than Reagan's, and more like that of Mr. Milliken.

Mr. Lucas will attempt to appeal to mainline Democrats, Black voters, moderate Republicans, fiscal conservatives of both parties, and some liberal Democrats tantalized by the opportunity for Michigan to elect the nation's first Black governor. If Mr. Lucas can capture 25-50% of the electoral support from Black voters and 10% of liberal white Democrats, he could afford to have some erosion of support from the most conservative outstate Republicans. Most assuredly, Mr. Lucas will have difficulty winning the substantial support that President Reagan received from blue-collar Democrats in the outer ring of the Detroit suburbs and our automotive union blue-collar outstate cities.

If he can fashion a Milliken-style coalition, he could threaten the incumbent governor in a well-designed, cleverly marketed television campaign. Mr. Blanchard has grown in office, gained increased popularity after a drastic initial decline in the popularity polls, been extraordinarily well marketed with the electronic and print media, and enjoys the compelling advantages of incumbency; yet, in a well-orchestrated Coca-Cola-style television campaign, he might be had, because, in today's world, issues and facts are less important than style and image.

Mr. Lucas will need to prove he can handle the vicious pressures of a statewide election and the cruel demands it will place on him and his family. The press will probe his views and specific stances on issues such as taxes, the state budget, abortion, the role of women, and economic development strategies. On issues, Mr. Lucas, we think, will sound like a moderate conservative: a critic of Michigan's business climate, opponent of state taxation and spending policies, a supporter of stricter law enforcement, and an advocate for greater spending for public safety. On noneconomic issues, he will, we think, emphasize family values and the sanctity of life (anti-abortion and anti-capital punishment).

Mr. Lucas will cite his accomplishments as County Executive: he trimmed many jobs and held the line on County taxes. While Mr. Lucas will undoubtedly attack Governor Blanchard's tax policies, his administration has been a beneficiary of state aid for Wayne County in a wide variety of areas, and he will be reminded that he supported the 1983 income tax increase.

Mr. Lucas insists that some excess state funds, which he estimates to be \$1 to \$1.5 billion, could be used for a tax rollback and prison construction. He has effectively referred to the costs of crime as a hidden crime tax, an interesting and salable concept on which to capitalize. He takes credit for spurring state action to build more prisons by setting up a committee to study prison needs last fall.

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Mr. Lucas has had great success in appealing to white voters. When elected Wayne County's Executive in 1982, Lucas first won a four-candidate Democratic primary with 55% of the vote and thence beat the Republican candidate with 77% of the vote. Despite the fact that whites make up 72% of Wayne county's electorate, in the general election Mr. Lucas received about half of the white suburban vote. If he can translate his strength in the primary and general elections, he can be formidable indeed and a danger to Democratic hopes to regain the Michigan Senate and increase their margin in the House of Representatives.

Still, running for a statewide office is a different story, and the jury is out on whether or not he can show the magic of a champion. The last Detroit to run for governor was Al Cobo, the GOP mayor of Detroit, and he got beaten rather handily by Governor G. Mennen Williams in 1958. While there are many uncertainties about the road ahead, one would have to look back to George Romney in 1961 and 1962 to find a modern Michigan counterpart to Bill Lucas with all his media attention and political charisma. His biggest hurdle is likely to be unspoken: is race a reason to vote for or against a candidate?

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