

Michigan COMMENTARY

THE 1988 ELECTION

by Craig Ruff

This commentary analyzes selected national and state political contests, assessing partisan fortunes and identifying factors that will influence the final outcomes.

The Presidency

America is left with a choice between Dukakis and Bush, two eminently safe and cautious men. On the policy decisions to be made by the next president, Dukakis or Bush would be deferential to aides, sensitive to public opinion, scrutinizing of all options, and fearful of mistake. The ship of state will be in competent but not inspired hands. Competence will be sufficient so long as domestic and international tranquility reigns. We shall hope for the best, for neither politician has shown instinctive brilliance in the toughest of situations or ability to move a mass of public opinion around to his point of view, two critical requisites of leadership in tough times. In fairness to both, no one is truly prepared by experience or education to handle the first crisis as president, and either may show more boldness than heretofore tested.

Peter Drucker, the guru of management science, would be proud of the presidential nominees. Dukakis and Bush share traits with previous cool-headed, intelligent, hands-on, managerial presidents: Jimmy Carter, Dwight Eisenhower, Herbert Hoover, and Grover Cleveland come to mind. They seem incapable of making the worst of a good situation. Likewise, they seem too analytical--too methodical to seize the moment--to make the best of a critically bad situation. I am reminded of Alistair Cooke's description of the late Duke of Windsor: "He was at his best when the going was good." The presidency tests far more than the ability to administer; our most revered presidents (FDR, Lincoln, Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, and perhaps Reagan) were among the most lackadaisical day-to-day managers to occupy the White House. These presidents rejected convention, pulled the country in untested directions, and risked short-term political capital (popularity) on long-term change. They also periscope their governing agenda on a relatively small number of sweeping changes, disregarding hundreds of less significant issues.

In the 1988 presidential contest, we have yet to see unconvention, towing into uncharted waters, risky strategies, and honing of agendas. Neither candidate has a strong or consistent ideology, and both have discarded ideology when political fortunes dictated. Each comes out of mainstream politics—hew to the center and mold views for the current public opinion. Reagan, after all, is one of the few ideologues ever to reach the White House, let alone prosper in it! Dukakis acts as if the presidency will be denied him only if he says something significant and controversial. Bush clumsily generates more media interest in his denials of preppyhood than in his

political and issue boldness. Both like playing it straight. Neither likes gimmicks. Neither likes taking a chance. The one more likely to be forced to shed his protective chrysalis is Bush, the current underdog. And he may do so only as a last resort, and perhaps not then.

The outcome will be close. Richard Nixon prophesied in early summer that TV viewers will be up into the wee hours, awaiting final California returns, to see who is elected. That may not be far off the mark. Dukakis benefits from high disapproval ratings for Bush, the preponderant media spotlight since May, a united party, strong support from women, an anxiety about the future, and an intriguing sentiment for "change." Even with low unemployment and inflation, a large number of voters seem intent to rock the boat and deny the GOP another lease on the White House. But the electoral college tilts toward Bush, who benefits most from his distinguished career, particularly his foreign policy experience; continuing peace and prosperity, which favor the "in" party; and a White House that will use its considerable means to steer the campaign and media agenda to his advantage. At most, 4-5 percent should divide the two candidates; voter turnout (which party gets its troops to the polls) and a single, major gaffe by either campaign could be the deciding factors. It is also possible that Jesse Jackson's strengths (registering and inspiring blacks) and weaknesses (overreaching rhetoric and imprudent negotiations in overseas trouble spots) could change the tempo and issues of the campaign. No one can call this election today with any degree of certainty. Since Michigan is one of the six states (others are California, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, and New Jersey) that may decide the election, voters here will be wooed often by the candidates.

It is an old saw in politics that voters do not pay much attention to campaigns until after the World Series. Furthermore, presidential elections have been conveniently scheduled in the same years as the Olympic Games. This year, as in the past, the heightening of messages and appeals will come after the World Series and Olympics--and the last thirty days of the campaign will make the difference.

U.S. Senate

As we wrote in March, look for very little change in the Senate and for the Democrats to retain the majority. Incumbents in varying degrees of trouble are: Lautenberg (D-N.J.), Hecht (R-Nev.), Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), Durenberger (R-Minn.), Karnes (R-Neb.), Bingaman (D-N.M.), Burdick (D-N.D.), and Chafee (R-R.I.) But the odds are that the Senate will stay Democratic by the existing 54-46 margin.

Senator Don Riegle, two-term Democratic incumbent, faces Jim Dunn (former one-term U.S. representative from East Lansing) in a race which could be closer than expected. But "expected" is a 65-35 percent romp by Riegle.

U.S. House of Representatives

The 255-177 Democratic majority (there are three vacancies) is secure. Dukakis would have to beat Bush by six points or better to gain more than a dozen Democratic seats; Bush would have to win by a similar margin to gain more than a dozen Republican seats.

Three of the nation's most hotly competitive House contests are in

Michigan. Democrats hope that Mitch Irwin can topple Bob Davis in the sprawling 11th District, covering 40 percent of the state's land area in the U.P. and northern lower peninsula. Lana Pollack is the Democrats' hope to unseat Carl Pursell in the 2nd District (Plymouth, Ann Arbor, and Jackson). The Republicans are pitting their strongest candidate, Doug Carl, against David Bonior in the 12th District (Macomb County). Since Irwin, Pollack, and Carl are all state senators from marginal districts, promoting one or more to Congress will shake up the state senate far more than the U.S. House. All face uphill fights but have a better chance than all other challengers to an incumbent in Michigan.

Michigan House of Representatives

The Democratic majority is secure. The party's 63-46 edge (there is one heavily Democratic seat vacant in Detroit) is somewhat less secure. Both parties have recruited strong candidates in several key races and will target funds carefully. Both parties have inspired their incumbents in the most marginal districts to build strong community ties. Four incumbents have the stiffest challenges: Tim Walberg (R-Lenawee County) and Agnes Dobronski (D-Dearborn) face well-known and popular opponents, and Jim Conners (R-Iron Mountain) and Bill Browne (D-Utica) represent districts where the opposing party has an electoral edge.

In addition to Walberg and Conners, Democrats believe they can upset GOP incumbents Ed Giese (Manistee) and Margaret O'Connor (Washtenaw County). In addition to Dobronski and Browne, Republicans believe they can upset the following Democratic incumbents: Kay Hart (Genesee County), Mary Brown (Kalamazoo), Roland Niederstadt (Saginaw), Debbie Farhat (Muskegon), James Docherty (Port Huron), Wilfred Webb (Hazel Park), and Sharon Gire and Ken DeBeaussaert (both Macomb County first-termers).

Democratic strategists hope for a net gain of one or two seats; Republicans hope for a net gain of two to six seats. No change or a one-seat gain by the Republicans seems most likely, barring an improbably large Dukakis or Bush win in the state.

Other Statewide Offices

As presidential votes go, so go the fortunes of partisan nominees for the educational posts (governing boards of Wayne State, Michigan State, University of Michigan, and Board of Education). If Dukakis carries the state, he will carry Democrats to victory for these posts. If Bush ekes out a narrow win, the Riegle coattails and Democratic base still should mean victory for the Democrats. If Bush takes Michigan by 6 percent or better, GOP prospects start to look promising.

Two supreme court justices are to be elected on the nonpartisan ballot. Incumbents James Brickley and Charles Levin filed affidavits placing themselves on the ballot and are prohibitive favorites. The Democratic and GOP state conventions, to be held, respectively, August 27-28 and September 9-10, will nominate two candidates each. One of the GOP's nods will go to Brickley.

There are hotly contested races for two newly created seats in each of the state's three court of appeals districts. In the 1st District (dominated by Wayne County), two Wayne circuit judges, Thomas Brennan and Maureen Reilly,

have the edge over Wayne Probate Judge Gladys Barsamian and Wayne Circuit Judge Richard Hathaway. In the 2nd District (mainly Macomb and Oakland), it is a toss-up among all four candidates: Mark Cavanagh (son of former Detroit mayor Jerome Cavanagh), Macomb Circuit Judge Kathleen Jansen, former State Board of Education member Marilyn Jean Kelly, and Oakland Circuit Judge Richard Kuhn. In the 3rd District (northern and western counties), give the edge to Richard Griffin (son of Robert Griffin, former U.S. senator and currently a justice of the Michigan Supreme Court) and Judy Hughes, Barry County prosecutor, over attorneys Janet Neff and Thomas Koernke.

Ballot Proposals

As of now, two questions will appear on the November ballot. Proposal B would add to the constitution the protection of crime victims' rights now guaranteed in state statute and permit criminals to be fined to help pay for restitution to victims. Since little attention has been paid to the proposal, a copy of the proposed constitutional amendment is attached.

Proposal A does not share similar anonymity. It would prohibit Medicaid-funded abortions. A "Yes" vote supports the ban; a "No" vote opposes the ban. Those who endured the 1972 referendum to allow abortions recall the shrill ads and high-pitched emotionalism. Abortion has become to twentieth-century U.S. politics what abolition of slavery was to nineteenth-century politics. Fervor in opinion has left precious little middle ground, squeezing out policy options on which the polar extremes can agree. The policy and politics of abortion, like those of slavery, involve two conflicting moral crusades, framing the issue in stark black-and-white terms; in the end, one side will emerge as the unconditional victor, more than likely through medical science's ability to sever the interconnection between fetus and mother rather than through judicial or political remedy. Until then, the electorate and legislative bodies throughout the country must endure the legitimate but draining attempts by both sides to win skirmishes on tangential issues such as Medicaid funding.

Pro Choice and Right To Life forces will spend freely on Proposal A. Their crusades cannot be rational, because the issue is inherently subjective, and messages must be directed to the fixed and polarized morals of the two sides. The airwaves will carry abrasive, strident, and graphic advertising, particularly during the two weeks prior to November 8. It may leave voters with the impression that this is a referendum on abortion, rather than on Medicaid funding for abortion. A fact likely to be obscured is that passage of a prohibition will not make abortions illegal.

The environmental bonding proposal is tied up in a legislative dispute over required use of prevailing wage rates on projects. In order for it to make the ballot, the legislature must adopt a resolution by September 9. There is a remote possibility that agreement will be reached and lawmakers called back early to approve it; otherwise, the legislature plans to stay in recess until September 14.

Although the legislature is nearing agreement on school finance reform, the governor and House Democrats will win their fight to keep the issue off the November ballot. Voters will have to wait at least until next March to decide its fate.

STATE OF MICHIGAN
84TH LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 1988

Introduced by Reps. Van Regenmorter, Perry Bullard, Gubow, Stabenow, Clack, Fitzgerald, Kosteva, Connors, Stopezynski, Willis Bullard, Stacey, Ciaramitaro, Ouwinga, Hoffman, Nye, Honigman, Hertel, Emerson, Wartner, Bankes, Emmons, Hoekman, Sparks, Gire, DeBeaussaert, Mathieu, Bennane, Palamara, Murphy, Farhat, Spaniola and Niederstadt

ENROLLED HOUSE
JOINT RESOLUTION P

A JOINT RESOLUTION proposing an amendment to the state constitution of 1963, by adding section 24 to article I, to maintain the rights of victims of crime.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the state of Michigan, That the following amendment to the state constitution of 1963, to maintain the rights of victims of crime, is proposed, agreed to, and submitted to the people of the state:

ARTICLE I

Sec. 24. (1) Crime victims, as defined by law, shall have the following rights, as provided by law:

The right to be treated with fairness and respect for their dignity and privacy throughout the criminal justice process.

The right to timely disposition of the case following arrest of the accused.

The right to be reasonably protected from the accused throughout the criminal justice process.

The right to notification of court proceedings.

The right to attend trial and all other court proceedings the accused has the right to attend.

The right to confer with the prosecution.

The right to make a statement to the court at sentencing.

The right to restitution.

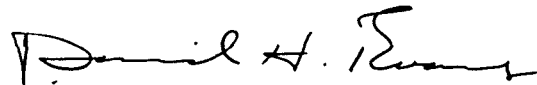
The right to information about the conviction, sentence, imprisonment, and release of the accused.

(2) The legislature may provide by law for the enforcement of this section.

(3) The legislature may provide for an assessment against convicted defendants to pay for crime victims' rights.

Resolved further, That the foregoing amendment shall be submitted to the people of the state at the next general election in the manner provided by law.

I hereby certify that on the 20th day of April, nineteen hundred eighty-eight, the foregoing joint resolution was agreed to by the House of Representatives, by a two-thirds vote of all the Representatives-elect.



Clerk of the House of Representatives.

I hereby certify that on the twelfth day of July, nineteen hundred eighty-eight, the foregoing joint resolution was agreed to by the Senate, by a two-thirds vote of all the Senators-elect.



Secretary of the Senate.