

FISCAL AWARENESS SERVICE



DR. GERALD FAVERMAN, Chairman of the Board

A LETTER OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

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TO: FISCAL AWARENESS SERVICE Subscribers
FROM: Gerald A. Faverman and Craig Ruff
SUBJECT: STATEWIDE ELECTIONS IN MICHIGAN

Gubernatorial Campaign

With one month to go in the gubernatorial campaign, a reward should be given to any Michigan citizen who can find it. Not since the day after the August 5 primary has the Blanchard-Lucas race generated an attention-grabbing front-page story. Short on substance, short on issues, and short of controversy, this noncampaign has but four short weeks left to generate voter interest.

The lethargy of this gubernatorial campaign in part reflects a contented electorate. Even in Lansing, family dinner conversation is far more apt to be devoted to MSU and U of M football prospects than to the Blanchard-Lucas campaign. The economy, by most measures, is fairly healthy. With some exceptions, most people in Michigan are comfortable with the way things are going. And comfort makes for boring politics.

Complacent media are doing little to dispel the ennui of the electorate. There are problems in Michigan: pockets of severe economic distress and unemployment, high crime rates, deterioration of the state's infrastructure, urban decay, high professional and product liability costs, high property taxes, and growing problems in managing toxic and solid waste, to name a few. The media traditionally play a major role in identifying problems, raising controversial issues, drawing attention to candidate differences, and flagging weaknesses. But with few exceptions, the media in Michigan have been blase' about this year's gubernatorial campaign, the state's problems, and political issues.

The general public and media cannot be faulted entirely for the lethargy about politics in Michigan. The gubernatorial candidates need to generate issues to capture the public's attention; thus far, they have failed to do so. This is not a surprising strategy for the incumbent, Governor Jim Blanchard; it is a surprising strategy for the underdog challenger, Bill Lucas. Lucas enjoyed early, postprimary attention. The historical significance of a black GOP nominee for governor was exciting, as was the choice of Colleen Engler as his running mate. But since the GOP state convention in late August, the Lucas campaign has been nearly invisible. Lucas has yet to embrace an issue that excites voters; he has yet to lay a glove on Blanchard. And he has yet to convey to the electorate a sense of urgency. Blanchard started the general election with a huge lead--25 percentage points--and he still has it in October. Blanchard could afford to coast in August and September; Lucas could

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not. It is Lucas's job to confront Blanchard, not the other way around. And for Lucas's campaign, the precious political commodity of time is slipping away.

We believe that Michigan Democrats and Governor Blanchard want not only to win, but to win big. Yet big wins in Michigan gubernatorial elections are rare. G. Mennen Williams never won more than 55.8 percent of the vote in his six gubernatorial campaigns. George Romney exceeded that twice, winning 56 percent in 1964 and 60.7 percent in 1966. William Milliken's best showing in his three races was 56.8 percent in 1978. By Michigan's gubernatorial standard, winning 55 percent of the vote is a "landslide." We believe that the Blanchard campaign is looking for a win in the range of 55 percent to 60 percent.

In campaigns, as in games, winning is the obvious goal. But in campaigns, there are often other objectives as well. A Blanchard landslide could carry in enough other Democratic contenders to imperil the GOP majority in the Senate. (Our next letter will cover legislative races, with particular emphasis on the key Senate races.) In addition, a substantial Blanchard victory would help position the governor as a potential national Democratic figure. We believe Blanchard will need at least a 60 percent win to gain national attention. His Democratic counterparts, such as Mario Cuomo in New York and Michael Dukakis in Massachusetts, will surely rack up landslides equal to or exceeding 60 percent. Furthermore, Blanchard's counterpart in Ohio, Richard Celeste, could steal much national thunder from Blanchard should he defeat 16-year veteran former governor James Rhodes by a split approaching 60-40 percent.

We believe also that state Democrats hope to regain their position as Michigan's "centrist" party. They see long-lasting gain from portraying the Michigan Republican party as straying too far right, pandering to the fundamentalists, and exorcising the party of moderates. The Democratic party of Blanchard is far more conservative than the Democratic party of Williams-Swainson-Hart-Riegle-Levin, embracing more businesspeople, farmers, and other traditionally Republican voters. Democrats feel they can label the GOP as a party controlled by the far right and position themselves dead-center in the political spectrum. Typically liberal themes will not be found in this year's Democratic campaigns. You will find few references to "labor," new governmental programs, social welfare, and human services issues. You will find many references to downsizing government, keeping taxes low, facilitating economic development, and improving the business climate.

The Republicans, too, have goals in addition to electing Lucas governor. They want to add a seat or two in the state Senate, hold the gains they made in the state House in 1984 (if not win outright control), bring more women, blacks, and other minorities into the GOP, and win national attention for their bold nomination of Lucas. One senses that the Republican goals are less ambitious than Democratic goals, that most Republicans would be pleased to escape 1986 with a respectable showing by Lucas, hanging onto the Senate, and maybe winning back the 6th congressional district from incumbent Democrat Bob Carr. Some Republicans may be looking ahead to 1988 and mounting a strong challenge to U.S. Senator Donald Riegle. If Lucas fails to win, but comes out of 1986 with a respectable showing, he could be Riegle's opponent. The 1984 GOP U.S. Senate nominee, Jack Lousma, is also waiting in the wings.

The Republicans' strategy in 1986 is to wrap the party in a clearly conservative mantle and to paint the Democrats as liberals in conservative

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clothing. The Lucas themes and issues to date have been conservative: lower taxes, improve the business climate, reform workers' compensation/unemployment insurance, and put able-bodied welfare recipients to work. One possible strategy is to paint Blanchard as a Mondale liberal. That will be difficult unless the Lucas camp uncovers an issue on which to hang such a claim. Also, such a strategy carries some risk; namely, alienating Democratic black voters. The Republicans would like, too, to see Blanchard portrayed and perceived as heading an "all talk and no action" administration. Again, they need a symbolic issue.

As of today, the Lucas strategy has been threefold: (1) hammer away at the historical significance of Michigan's electing a black governor; (2) attract large numbers of Democratic black voters; and (3) bring Republican voters back into the fold. Given that it is difficult to work out themes that would appeal both to Democratic black voters and to Republicans, one senses that the Lucas campaign will emphasize in his television ads and appearances his personal character and the historical significance of his candidacy. But when a candidate is behind by the kind of margin by which Lucas now trails Blanchard, he must go on the offensive. Lucas must discredit Blanchard on some issue; he must give voters specific reasons for rejecting a second term. Feeling good about the challenger is not enough to displace the incumbent.

This Blanchard-Lucas race will become closer, as all lopsided races do in Michigan. However, we do not see this campaign stirring sufficient public attention and media scrutiny to close the gap by election day. But funny things can happen. After all, the old wisdom in politics is that nobody pays any attention until after the World Series. The Blanchard campaign could make a terrible blunder. Lucas could find the right issue with which to tag Blanchard. But the citizens paying attention right now are ready to give Blanchard a second term and it's going to be exceedingly difficult for the Lucas campaign to change this.

Attorney General and Secretary of State

Every four years Frank Kelley and Dick Austin get reelected.

State Educational Posts

Two members each on the State Board of Education, the University of Michigan Board of Regents, the Wayne State Board of Governors, and the Michigan State University Board of Trustees will be elected this November. Each board has eight elected members. Because no more than a smattering of voters can identify even one or two candidates for all these posts, the party that fares best at the top of the ticket typically fares best in these elections. Occasionally, as in 1980, the partisan balance is so close that an individual can win on name recognition (small as it is). But more often than not, if one Democrat wins, all eight Democrats win or if one Republican wins, all eight Republicans win. Because the Democrats are expected to be strong this year, look for the Democrats to win all eight education posts; the one possible Republican survivor could be Barbara Dumouchelle on the State Board of Education. Mrs. Dumouchelle won in 1978, while all other Republicans lost.

Supreme Court

Twenty-four candidates seek two nonpartisan positions on the Michigan Supreme Court. Michigan's Byzantine system of electing the judiciary turned into a laughingstock this year when a loophole in state election law permitted any

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qualified citizen to simply file with the secretary of state to have his or her name placed on the ballot. Tedium will wear out most voters by the time they get to this section of the ballot--and terror at the laundry list of names is apt to discourage even the sophisticated voter from spending a lot of time sorting out the twenty-four names, so name recognition may carry the day here. The top votegetters will likely be Justice Dennis Archer (who will be designated on the ballot as "Justice of the Supreme Court") and former Republican U.S. Senator Robert P. Griffin. With an outside chance of winning are E. Thomas Fitzgerald (who is the nominee of the Tisch Independent party and has a good Irish name), Barbara MacKenzie (one of only two women on the ballot and an appeals court judge), Dean Robb (a Traverse City attorney, backed by Mayor Young, labor, and the Democratic party organization), and Zolton Ferency (former Democratic state chair and gubernatorial candidate).

Below is a list of all candidates for statewide office.

<u>Statewide Candidates</u>		
<u>Office</u>	<u>Democratic</u>	<u>Republican</u>
Governor/Lt. Governor	James J. Blanchard* Martha Griffiths*	William Lucas Colleen Engler
Attorney General	Frank Kelley*	Robert Cleland
Secretary of State	Richard Austin*	Weldon Yeager
State Board of Education	Annetta Miller* Gumecindo Salas	Barbara Dumouchelle* Patricia Hartnagle
U of M Board of Regents	Paul Brown* James L. Waters*	Cynthia Hudgins Gary Frink
MSU Board of Trustees	Barbara J. Sawyer* Joel Ferguson	Delores M. Cook Cyril Gregoricka
Wayne State Board of Governors	Leon Atchison* Max J. Pincus*	Mary Dahn Elizabeth Hardy

Nonpartisan--State Supreme Court

Dennis W. Archer*	E. Leonard Howarth	Willard L. Mikesell
James J. Carras	James T. Kallman	John P. O'Hara, Jr.
Henry Clay	Jerry J. Kaufman	Melvin L. Paunovich
Jeffrey C. Collison	James J. Kelley	David H. Raaflaub
Zolton Ferency	Stephen P. Korn	Dean Robb
Andrea J. Ferrara	Barbara B. MacKenzie	Caleb M. Simon
E. Thomas Fitzgerald	Michael Joseph Marutiak	Michael F. Simon
Robert P. Griffin	John J. McDonough	James R. Stelt

* = Incumbent

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