

ONE-26-34

# THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

A Scripps-Howard Newspaper

MICHAEL GREHL, Editor

Published by The Memphis Publishing Co., 495 Union, Memphis, Tenn. 38101

JOSEPH R. WILLIAMS, Business Manager

Consolidated July 1, 1894

}	The Memphis Commercial . . . . .	Established 1889
	The Appeal . . . . .	Established 1840
	The Avalanche . . . . .	Established 1867

Page 6

Friday, October 29, 1976

## The 'Fuzziness' Issue

IN THE NECK-AND-NECK drive to the finish line the presidential campaign cannot be expected to enlighten voters any more than they have been.

Any movement by the vast numbers of undecided voters must therefore be expected to result from whatever perceptions of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter are already held.

IT IS EXTREMELY interesting that Louis Harris, whose surveys show Carter's big post-convention lead over Ford slipping to a hairline, has decided that the election is too close to call and that he thinks he knows why Carter has fallen so far.

"Doubts about Carter are the key to why the election is so close," Harris told the National Press Club in Washington this week.

"Fuzziness" on issues is given as one of the prime reasons for those doubts.

The inflated admiration for Carter in the polls taken just after his Aug. 15 acceptance of the Democratic nomination at the party's convention in New York naturally was expected to drop once the Republicans settled their differences at their August convention in Kansas City.

Once President Ford was running against Carter rather than Ronald Reagan, he offset some of the Carter lead.

The gains in the polls which Ford has made since then have hinged on the actual

campaign, the development of issues by both candidates, and the three face-to-face debates.

It was the period in which Carter was expected by voters to become specific about the vague promises he made or how he would reform taxes, reorganize the federal bureaucracy, trim defense costs, finance new programs.

Carter may think he has done this. But pollster Harris points out the crucial fact — that a great many undecided voters do not perceive any clear Carter program. And if what voters see is fuzziness, that is how they will think of Carter on election day next Tuesday.

Certainly Carter has not been alone in blurring issues. Ford's vice presidential running mate, Bob Dole, has done his share of raveling the edges of the issues.

But it is Carter who is seeking to wrest the presidency away from Jerry Ford. It is his campaign that is being watched by the people and it is because the people have doubts about Jimmy Carter at this late date that a long lead has skidded to a narrow margin.

THUS, FOR ALL the lofty posturing and politicizing since mid-July, the 1976 presidential campaign comes down to the issue of Carter's fuzziness.

And if that is how the thoughtful voters see Carter at this stage, we think they're right.

## A Third I-40 Casualty

IT'S ALMOST unbelievable that a 3.7-mile stretch of unfinished pavement has immobilized three U.S. secretaries of transportation. But that's what's happened with the withdrawal of William T. Coleman from making a decision in the Overton Park expressway case.

The proposed park route's first casualty was John Volpe, who allowed his term as secretary to end without closing the case. His successor, Claude Brinegar, also left office without a final decision being made.

When Coleman took over, the process of examining and evaluating the park route began all over again. The state was told progress couldn't be made until a state plan for the expressway was submitted. That was finally done, and Coleman said a decision would be reached by the end of the year.

NOW COLEMAN has disqualified himself because his daughter has taken a job with the law firm that originally filed suit to stop the completion of Interstate 40 through the park. This newspaper has been as concerned as anyone about conflicts of interest, but Coleman's apparent

anxiety is ridiculous. The expressway case will never end if federal officials keep running for cover.

Coleman's deputy secretary, John Barnum, has been assigned to take over the case. A public hearing has been scheduled for Nov. 23 in Memphis. One source said the transportation department will accept written comments on the expressway route through Nov. 30, with a decision coming within 60 to 90 days after that. We can only hope that the department realizes the urgency of keeping to that schedule.

A MEANS MUST be found to reconcile what the city needs, what its citizens want, what the law says is required and what should be done to protect the environment. No resolution of this problem will satisfy everyone. But the tortuous legal proceedings have only created frustration and dismay at the inability of the government to take decisive action. When a firm decision is reached, the city can start settling down to live with it and to adjust transportation planning in relation to it. That will be far better than the endless waiting.