

One group's '100' is another's '0' on Capitol Hill

By TOM LONERGAN

To the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), U.S. Rep. William Brodhead is a "100".

As far as the Americans for Constitutional Action (ACA) is concerned, the Democratic congressman, whose 17th district includes Southfield, the Farmington area and Redford Township, is a "0".

The numbers are ratings of the congressman's voting record last year. The liberal ADA likes the way Brodhead votes. Last year, he agreed with the ADA position on major issues 100 percent of the time.

The conservative ACA, on the other hand, would just as soon favor Brodhead's retirement. It could only agree with his votes 4 percent of the time on issues.

U.S. REP. WILLIAM Broomfield, R-Birmingham, rates fairly high with the ACA (76), while the liberals gave him the lowest rating (16) among five Observer & Eccentric area congressmen.

"The ratings game," writes congressional Roll Call Report Editor Richard G. Thomas, "is a much-criticized but irrefragable fact-of-life which, to many is Exhibit A of how narrow-minded, single-interest pressure groups exert undue influence on the legislative process."

"To play the game, a special interest arbitrarily picks a dozen or so issues it considers to be the year's most important, and measures how individual legislators voted on each issue. The group compiles a percentage pegging the lawmaker as a good guy or bad guy."

ROLL CALL Report, a weekly Washington, D.C. news service reports weekly in this newspaper on how congressmen and senators vote on pending federal legislation. It recently compiled ratings on area congressmen from major liberal and conservative groups.

Besides ADA and ACA, they include the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO, Consumer Federation of America, National Education Association (NEA) and two senior citizens groups — one liberal, one conservative.

Among area congressmen, only Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, comes closest to pleasing both liberal and conservatives. Pursell's 2nd district includes

Livonia, Northville, the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area of Washtenaw County and Monroe County.

Broomfield, whose 19th district includes the affluent Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills and West Bloomfield areas, rates high among the four conservative groups in the survey.

U.S. Reps. William Ford, D-Taylor, James Blanchard, D-Pleasant Ridge,

and David Bonior, D-Mt. Clemens, have high liberal rankings.

Ford's heavily blue collar Democratic 15th district includes Westland, Garden City and Canton Township. Blanchard's 18th district covers Troy and most of south Oakland County. Bonior's 12th district is mainly in Macomb County, but includes half of Avon Township and the city of Rochester.

PURSELL DIDN'T rate particularly high with any group. The AFL-CIO gave the Plymouth Republican a 65 rating, the NEA, 57, the Chamber of Commerce, 47. He is one of only a few Michigan Republicans to earn a labor endorsement and receive union contributions.

The ADA liked Pursell's voting

record nearly 60 percent of the time last year while the ACA rates him a 39.

However, the conservative National Alliance of Senior Citizens says it agreed with Pursell on its issues two-thirds of the time. The National Council of Senior Citizens, a labor-financed group, gave Pursell a 22 percent rating.

The sharpest rating contrast can be found between the AFL-CIO and the Chamber of Commerce, long-time lobbying adversaries.

The nation's largest labor organization gave Bonior, Brodhead, and Blanchard ratings of 99 or more. Ford polled an 88, Broomfield, a 82.

The chamber, primary lobbyist for the nation's small and medium sized businesses, gives Broomfield a 94, Brodhead a zero, Bonior, 6, Blanchard, 11 and Ford, 24.

NEA handed out perfect 100 ratings to Brodhead, Ford and Bonior. It rated Broomfield a zero.

THE HOUSE Republican Research Committee raps the ratings game, according to Roll Call Report. It said:

"Conclusions can be drawn which may indeed do injustice to a member's position, or, on the other hand, provide accolades unjustly deserved," according to the GOP committee.

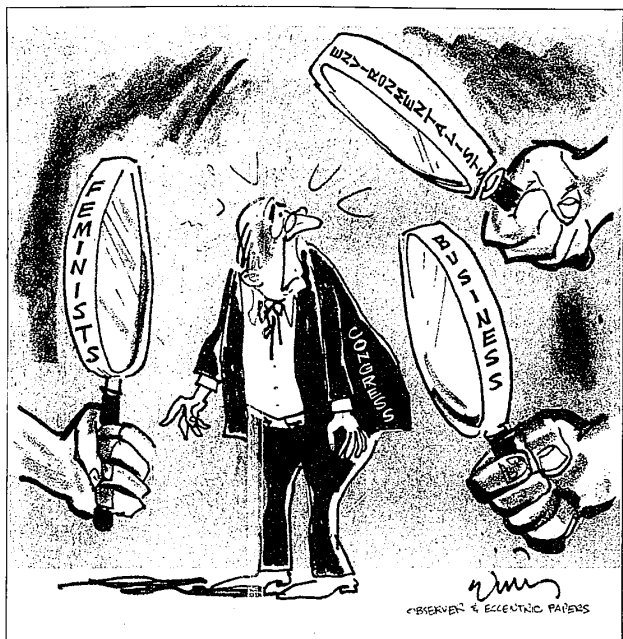
"Moreover, ratings cast no light on a member's responsiveness to his constituents, integrity in his political work, or ability in the legislative forum."

Thomas warns voters to approach the ratings "warily."

"Nowhere else can busy voters cut through the deceptions and complexities of Congress to find their congressman reduced, for ready reference, on election day, to a number," he writes.

And Thomas notes the influence of lobbyists has been downplayed.

"Somehow, the ratings game and allied pressure tactics are never depicted by Washington restaurants in those placemats showing high-schoolers and other tourists. 'How a Bill Becomes a Law.'"



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