

Exec candidates rehash county issues in 1st televised debate

By TOM LONERGAN

The debate stage was familiar — television cameras, bright studio lights and two candidates in business suits standing behind tan-wood podiums.

But the issues they discussed were property taxes, regional transportation, toxic waste and parks rather than nuclear weapons, federal spending and inflation.

Televised debates have become characteristic of presidential elections. But last Wednesday evening, one hour of WJBK-TV air time featured two politicians much closer to home — Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, a Republican; and his Democratic opponent, F. Thomas Lewand, a county commissioner from Royal Oak.

The job carries a salary of more than \$60,000 and control of 43 percent of a county budget expected to be near \$96.3 million in 1981.

While the TV debate, sponsored by the Detroit Metropolitan Area League of Women Voters, was a first, for campaigns it was pretty much a re-run.

Murphy and Lewand met in two previous debates before the Troy and North Oakland chambers of commerce.

Murphy, who initially refused to debate Lewand on live television, said in his closing statement that Lewand "is trying to create an image of himself and then sell you the image."

"I can't do that. I'm not a good enough actor, and whenever someone tries to package me, my sharp edges poke right through the box."

Responding to a question regarding the number of women in the top ranks of county government, Murphy said, "I'm not ashamed of the number of women I have working on my staff."

Among Murphy's 11 department heads and two deputy county executives are two women, including an office coordinator. Murphy added that "55 percent" of all county employees were women.

Lewand called Murphy's appointment of women "a shame" and pledged "fair and equal representation of women" in his administration.

Regarding a common complaint that the county's more populous southern end receives more services than in the north, Murphy's response was blunt:



F. THOMAS LEWAND

"They (the southern) have got most of the population, so they get most of the health nurses and sanitarians," he

said. "Because they've got most of the population, they fill up most of the jail."

WHILE LEWAND repeated his campaign themes that Murphy has been neither an efficient manager nor effective lobbyist for state and federal funds, the first-term commissioner had some changes for the TV cameras.

In the two previous debates, Lewand said the proposed Tisch tax cut amendment would be "devastating" to county government. Last week, he didn't use the word "devastating" but said voters could expect "great demand" on county government if Tisch passed.

Previously, Lewand supported the merger of the department of public works, under the executive, with the drain commissioner's office. On that issue, Murphy has been at odds with cur-



DANIEL MURPHY

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THE OCCASION was the first live televised debate between executive candidates since Oakland six years ago became Michigan's first county to be managed this way.

DURING THE previous 50 minutes of questioning by a panel of four newsmen, some of Murphy's sharp edges appeared.

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