

Patterson seeks to 'change system'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

L. Brooks Patterson, the Oakland County prosecutor who wants to be governor of Michigan, opposes increasing road taxes, a full-time state legislature and appointing members of the two highest courts.

Patterson, 43, a Republican who frequently disagrees with such party leaders as Gov. Milliken, fielded a barrage of questions on a broad range of topics from the press and audience at a Livonia Lions Club public meeting last week.

"Generally, I disagree with the philosophy of the legislation that would increase taxes on the motor- ing public of Michigan when I feel they're already over-taxed," said Patterson when asked about a package of road-funding bills sponsored by state Rep. Mary Brown, D-Kalamazoo.

THE PACKAGE has been supported by the Oakland County Road Commission and highway interests. Key bills would tie the gasoline tax to the wholesale price of gasoline and increase truck taxes by 30 percent.

"The bills, as I understand, have now been amended to something called the 'Ohio plan,' which would index the tax on gasoline to a federal formula. I haven't a high regard for that because basically they call for more revenue.

"Another bill would tax cars, not on weight but a flat tax, so everyone who shifted to a smaller car and therefore enjoys less tax now is going to be penalized. I don't think that's fair."

"Another bill would raise the tax on trucks 30 percent. Now I know there are haulers who refuse to come into Michigan because of the taxes already, and it's pretty clear we're going to drive that business away."

"The only bills which made sense to me (HB 4939) would restructure the formula to give the road commissions a greater share of the sales taxes in the general fund (on motor vehicle-related items)."

"That would be deducted from such programs as welfare, which I think is over-funded to begin with," said Patterson.

HE HAD "no objection" to the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority's stated intention of asking voters for a tax to support public transit.

"Any time any government agency wants to raise taxes by putting it to the voters, I have no objection," said Patterson, without saying how he would vote.

Patterson will cross swords with Lt. Gov. James Brickett, his rival for the GOP nomination to succeed Milliken, over Brickett's efforts to shorten the ballot.

Brickett's petition drive would ask voters to

amend the state constitution by giving the governor power to appoint Supreme Court justices, Appeals Court judges, the State Board of Education and the governing boards of the three largest state universities.

"Mr. Brickett is asking, 'Are you for a shorter, clearer ballot? An uncluttered ballot? Or if you're not, you must be for a cluttered, long, bedsheet ballot.'"

"That's not the principle I see involved in his petition drive. His principle is to draw more power to the office of governor and appoint the judges. My instincts are to say, 'Leave the vote with the public. I trust the public judgment day in and day out.'"

A CONSTANT theme running through Patterson's political career and campaign talk was the frustration of seeking to amend "the system" from the outside.

The third-term prosecutor has own petition drive going to re-institute the death penalty in Michigan. And he noted that seven other petition drives are in progress to put proposals before the voters.

"Why is anyone going around the Legislature to make changes in our structure? Because the state Legislature, which has the primary responsibility for making changes, is not doing so," he said.

He favors a proposal by Robert Tusch, known for his tax-cutting plans, to make the Legislature part-time.

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