

Dems charge partisan politics in pair of appeals board changes

By Carol Astizan
staff writer

Overriding objections by several Democratic commissioners that Republicans are "playing partisan politics," the Oakland County Board of Commissioners appointed two Republicans to the Personnel Appeals Board.

The vote was 17-10 along straight party lines.

"I consider this an abuse of power," said Democratic Commissioner James Doyon of Madison Heights. "For over a decade, we've had bipartisan (representation) on this board."

Republicans Thursday chose Commissioners Anne M. Hobart, R-Pontiac, and Nancy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, for the appeals panel.

Doyon had served as the panel's chairman last year. Charles T. Whitlock, R-Clarkston, was the other

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Commissioner James Doyon

representative to the panel until he resigned in November. He was succeeded by John P. Calandro, R-Northville.

"THIS IS AN attempt to emasculate the protections of our employees," Doyon charged.

"We've got some hot potatoes to handle in the next two months that involve the Sheriff's Department. I wonder if

this isn't some kind of (attempt) to deal with those questions in a political manner."

Without a Democrat on appeals board, members of the sheriff's department may feel they're not getting a fair hearing, Doyon said. Sheriff Johannes Spreen is a Democrat.

The five-member appeals board represents the last step in the county employee grievance procedure. It is comprised of two members elected by county employees, two members elected by the Board of Commissioners and a member-at-large.

Doyon said the action destroys safeguards built into the system. He added that the panel would suffer because neither Hobart nor McConnell has a working knowledge of the merit system. That system is a set of rules which govern city employees.

COMMISSIONER Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, added, "we'll be losing the ability to speak on behalf of

Oakland County government without any politics, prejudice or bias."

Pernick said county government will be unable to say to employees, "We've reviewed your case and are going to make a judgment strictly on its merits."

Commissioner Hubert Price Jr., D-Pontiac, said the appointments came as a surprise to Democrats. His attempts to have the matter referred to legal counsel failed.

"At no point, in public meetings of the Republican caucus, has it ever been noted there would be any change with regard to a decade-old practice," he said.

"Not one word was whispered with regard to this possibility until we heard it in the shadows of the hallways of this Board of Commissioners auditorium yesterday."

DEFENDING the appointments, Commissioner John E. Olsen, R-Huntington Woods, said, "Our objective is to appoint two good, competent people regardless of party."

"I'm disappointed that he (Doyon) feels he might be the only one competent to serve on that board," Olsen added.

"The suggestion that the process can't be fair unless there is representation from both parties indicates that it's truly in the political arena."

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No major changes in Oakland chairs

Only one new face will be among the leadership posts on the Oakland County Board of Commissioners this year.

Commissioner John E. Olsen, R-Huntington Woods, who will continue as Republican caucus chairman, will also serve as chairman of the General Government Committee.

That chairmanship was formerly held by Wallace F. Gabler, R-Royal Oak, who didn't seek re-election last November.

Leadership positions were formally approved by the board at Thursday's meeting. Republicans hold a 17-10 ad-

vantage over Democrats on the board.

Board chairman Richard H. Wilcox, R-Orionville, and vice chairwoman Lilian V. Moffitt, R-Bloomfield Township, will continue in those capacities.

Chairmanships of the other five committees remain the same as last year: O. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, finance; Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Township, health and human services; John J. McDonald, R-Farmington Hills, personnel; Anne M. Hobart, R-Waterford Township, planning and building; James E. Lanni, R-Royal Oak, public services.

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