

GOP finds sobered Dems in mood to negotiate

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

In the opening weeks of 1983, Gov. James Blanchard and his Democratic leaders in the Michigan Legislature were confident they could blow over Republican opposition.

That has changed, say two veteran Republican lawmakers.

"No longer are they the cocky, 'We're-gonna-do-it-our-way, it's our government' types," said Republican Jack Kirksey, a fourth-term state representative from Livonia.

His neighbor, Rep. W.V. (Sandy) Brotherton, R-Farmington, agrees. Their attitude on the floor is one that says, "We'll give you Republicans a chance to go along and work with us — but if you step too far out of line, we'll wield the big stick," said the fifth-term lawmaker.

THE MOOD in Lansing has "changed and changed again," in Kirksey's words, since Blanchard took office Jan. 1 as the first Democratic governor in 20 years.

Democrats put up all 58 votes to pass

analysis

Blanchard's personal income tax increase in the House. In the Senate, 19 of the 20 Democrats held together for the tax vote, with a lone Republican senator providing the 20th vote.

At that point, bipartisanship in Michigan government was at a modern low. It was an unusual situation because Michigan voters had been picking Republican governors (George Romney and William Milliken) and Democratic legislatures since the late 1960s.

Out of necessity, the parties learned to get along. From the mid-1970s, major decisions were made by Milliken and the House and Senate leaders of each party, then simply ratified whole by the legislature.

That changed when a Democratic governor had to rely on his party alone to raise the income tax rate from 4.6 to 6.35 percent. Republicans freely acknowledged a necessity to raise taxes

but withheld their votes when Democrats rejected GOP amendments.

WHY, THEN, is the mood changing back to one of bipartisan dealing?

"Democrats underestimated voter reaction to the income tax increase," answered Kirksey. "They miscalculated the lasting quality of that resentment to that vote. Now, the minority has some ability to maneuver."

The threat of recall has had a sobering effect on the Democratic legislators and the governor. He is no longer bragging about saving the state from financial ruin. He is now on the defensive.

"In the last six weeks, things have returned to the situation of the last legislative session," said Kirksey.

Criticism of Blanchard appointments, the effort to put a tax rollback on the ballot and the "bad press" Democrats have received over the threat of reappointment have sobered them, Brotherton added.

Officially, Republican Party Chairman Spencer Abraham opposes the recall effort against Blanchard. So do most GOP legislators. But they clearly



Rep. Jack Kirksey
Democrats "miscalculated"

enjoy seeing Democrats squirm as the recall movement continues to burn.

REAPPOINTMENT is an issue that hangs quietly in the background.

Republicans reduced their minorities in both the House and Senate in the

'The threat of recall has had a sobering effect on the Democratic legislators and the governor.'

—Rep. Jack Kirksey

'Bad press' over the threat of reappointment has also sobered the Democrats.

—Rep. Sandy Brotherton



Rep. W.V. Brotherton
reappointment a threat

1982 election on the basis of a reappointment plan drawn up by an appointee of the state Supreme Court. But a legislative majority could still draw up a new plan for the 1984 elections that would favor Democrats.

Of the firm but softening discipline in Democratic ranks, Brotherton said, "We don't know what was done to the Democrats — what powers of persuasion, threat or committee assignment, help to marginal candidates and the benefits of reappointment."

"It (reappointment) is laying there as a threat: 'If you get too mouthy, then we're gonna go ahead and do it.' That's been inflated."

IF DEMOCRATS are willing to negotiate as they did in the 1970s, it's not over every issue, the Republicans find.

"Their bill to give transportation au-

thorities the power of taxation went through, but not in a day," said Kirksey. Some of his amendments, rejected at first by Democratic leaders, were later reintroduced by other lawmakers and adopted, he said.

A bill to reduce local control over placement of the mentally ill had barely passed in the Senate and was in trouble in the House, Kirksey said.

Brotherton chuckled over an appropriations bill that had been heavily amended on the House floor to add \$28 million to help "out-of-formula" school districts, and then \$28 million to help "in-formula" districts — to the acute embarrassment of Democratic leaders.

Brotherton sees more room for negotiation on less partisan issues — notably economic development and medical. These are due to be taken up in the fall session.

Help Blanchard 'dig out' — Fishman

Calling organized labor his "family," Sam Fishman of Southfield was unanimously elected president of the Michigan State AFL-CIO.

Delegates to the state federation's 15th constitutional convention in Detroit also re-elected Walter L. Oliver as secretary-treasurer and selected members to the union's executive council.

Fishman told delegates, "Organized labor has been my life, and the working men and women of organized labor have been my family."

Fishman has spent his entire adult life in the trade union movement, moving up through the ranks of the United Auto Workers, where he headed that union's Community Action Program in Michigan for 12 years. After the UAW reaffiliated with the state AFL-CIO last year, Fishman was elected executive vice president of the state federation.

FISHMAN CALLED for continued vigorous political action to promote labor's agenda in state and federal government.

"Today the bargaining table will determine what we get for our labor, if we are working, while what we do at the ballot box will determine whether we are working and whether there is anything to bargain over."

He praised Gov. James Blanchard and Democratic state legislators for cleaning up "the biggest budget mess in the country" created by "20 years of Republican incompetence."

He criticized recall efforts aimed at Democratic officials, saying, "The same crowd who got our state and our people in a \$1.7-billion hole now want

to blame Jim Blanchard for grabbing a shovel and digging us out."

"We are going to stand behind Jim Blanchard," Fishman said. "In fact, we're going to grab a shovel and help him dig Michigan out."

He said that Michigan labor is willing to "hand a shovel" to business and industry so they can "dig us out."

"BUT WE WILL not permit Michigan and Michigan's citizens to be buried by rip-off proposals made in the name of 'improved business climate,'" he said.

He criticized the Reagan administration as "indifferent and insensitive to the pain and suffering of working men and women."

"After engineering a miserable depression and cutting our benefits, cutting taxes for the rich by billions more, the Reagan administration is promising us, 'The check is in the mail,'" he said. "Our reply is: As far as we're concerned, your check bounced three years ago! Your promises came back stamped 'insufficient honesty.'"

Fishman called for a major rally in Detroit on Labor Day in support of Solidarity Day III, a national day of labor protest against the policies of the Reagan administration.

"We will give voice and visibility to our dissatisfaction with the current course of economic, political and legislative policies," he said. "And on Election Day 1984, Solidarity Day IV, a united labor movement in this state and country will march to the polls to victory in the general election."

"OVER THE past 40 years, I have

seen the basic humanity of our members expressed in the day-to-day practices of ordinary decent people who care for each other." Fishman told the convention delegates.

"People who look after each other on the job, and once the whistle blows and

the work day is over, extend their concern and compassion to their friendships, their neighborhoods, their communities and their state."

He hailed outgoing President William C. Marshall as "a very special friend" of Michigan workers.

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