

# Blanchard tries to 'educate' auto suppliers

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Auto suppliers — the hundreds of small firms which make parts for the Big Four auto manufacturers — are in deep trouble and want state help.

"We'll do anything we can do, either by getting out of the way or helping them," said Gov. James J. Blanchard this week as he unveiled a long list of efforts the state will make.

A report entitled "Auto Supplier Target Industry Development Program" said suppliers should be a priority industry once the Michigan Strategic Fund is in operation. Auto suppliers will be high on the list to receive help from federal-state job retraining funds. And they will be helped by an array of educational resources — the fledgling Industrial Technology Institute in Ann Arbor, state universities and particularly community colleges.

Blanchard praised the work of a task force, headed by General Motors Chairman Roger B. Smith, of Bloomfield Hills, for its 33 pages of recommendations.

ALAN WEBBER, a Harvard University business school professor hired to review the new report, said in an interview that the auto industry provides a "case study" in how other nations "are doing a better job of integrating business, government and labor's efforts."

Indeed, a theme pervading the report and news conference was cooperation

between those three economic sectors. "The level of competition in the industry has increased dramatically," said Webber. Auto suppliers see their numbers shrinking, with remaining firms being asked to take greater responsibility for innovation and new product development, as well as for improving product quality and productivity.

Webber said his six weeks of interviews with suppliers showed they believe "the cost of doing business in Michigan is too high and must be reduced," particularly unemployment and workers compensation costs.

"MANY SUPPLIERS said they needed information and training about new technologies, new production techniques... and new approaches to managing people to help them become more productive," Webber said.

"Most suppliers said they would welcome financial aid to help defray the costs of learning new methods," as well as help in developing new markets, he reported.

Of the 2,500 suppliers of parts, components and materials, 80 percent are small — fewer than 100 employees, he said.

While suppliers gave educational and governmental efforts high marks, they found most underfunded and understaffed, he said.

A KEY organization in helping auto suppliers will be the Industrial Tech-

nology Institute (ITI) in Ann Arbor, and Blanchard promised it support.

Jerome Smith, director of ITI for the past four months, said it is "positioned between academia and industrial experimentation. We are hastening the process of putting research results into implementation."

"We are a private, nonprofit, research and development organization in the area of industrial automation," said Smith, a former professor of fluid mechanics at Princeton University and holder of three degrees in aeronautical engineering.

"We have 30 employees now and ex-

pect to grow to 250 in three years," he said. Funding has come from the state and the Dow and Kellogg foundations.

What will ITI do? Smith gave three answers:

- Give direct consulting services to auto suppliers "where we can learn as well as perform a service."

- Put on workshops on factory communications, including use of digitally controlled devices for information flow.

- Indirectly serve as a technology developer by attracting bright, new people to the state. "Many may choose

to start their own small firms here," he said.

MUCH OF Blanchard's program for auto suppliers was a restatement of already announced plans, such as attacking the costs of unemployment compensation, workers compensation, health care and bureaucracy.

But even before Blanchard's news conference began, UAW President Owen Bieber issued a statement saying "the UAW would not favor steps to improve our state's so-called 'business climate' at the expense of necessary legislative protection for workers, or by shifting tax burdens unfairly to non-

business taxpayers."

That failed to dismay Blanchard, a Democrat elected in 1982 with strong UAW support. Handed a newspaper's copy of the UAW's remarks, the governor shrugged. "This is a broad statement that probably anyone could agree with. Owen Bieber has been a very helpful member of this task force."

Bieber said he supported "the process of tripartite reindustrialization." He said it was not surprising that in a report reflecting the views of business, labor and government, "specific recommendations do not totally satisfy the UAW."

## O'Brien named new chief judge

Francis X. O'Brien has been elected chief judge of the Circuit Court in Oakland County. As chief judge, O'Brien will be responsible for the administration of the court during his two-year term.

O'Brien first served in the county as chief deputy clerk-register of deeds from 1965-68. He practiced law from 1968 to 1972. After four years as a district judge in Royal Oak, he was elevated to the circuit bench.

O'Brien teaches in the legal assistant program at Oakland University. In addition, he serves as an adjunct professor in Cooley Law School's Advocacy Program.

Judge O'Brien studied law through the National Judicial College and the American Academy of Judicial Education at Stanford, Harvard, University of Nevada, and the Michigan Judicial Institute.



Francis X. O'Brien



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