

Redistricting compromise in the works

By Tim Richard
staff writer

All year long, the two parties in Michigan's Legislature have been poles apart. Last week, however, there was movement toward a compromise over the touchiest issue of all — reapportionment — and some lawmakers are unhappy about it.

"The Republican caucus does not want to support any redistricting plan whatsoever," said Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville.

But Geake confirmed that Republicans Harry Gast of St. Joseph and William Sederburg of Lansing were meeting with Senate Democratic Leader William Faust of Westland to see if they could work out a more palatable alternative to Faust's SB 3, a redistricting bill that would cost the GOP two or three incumbent senators.

"They're meeting on their own," Geake added.

FRESHMAN REP. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, offered her view.

"We're not here to represent geographical boundaries. We're here to represent people," she said.

"I don't know if my convenience should be a factor. If you go outstate, you'll find some representatives have 16 or 18 townships and several counties."

Berman's district includes two cities: Southfield and Lathrup Village. Prior to 1982, Southfield had been split into districts represented by Republican W.V. Brotherton of Farmington and Democrat Joe Forbes of Oak Park. Southfield had not had its "own" state rep since the '60s.

When the Democratic caucus was discussing redistricting, Berman told the leaders she would not accept "tearing apart my city," meaning Southfield. Under the new Democratic redistricting plan, she would pick up a few precincts in Berkley and keep Southfield and Lathrup Village. It satisfied her.

NEVERTHELESS, Berman admits "mixed feelings about reapportioning the Legislature after only two years. I have not yet made a commitment on my vote," she said.

"I have honest concerns," she said, and listed them:

- Timing. Two Democratic state senators were recalled last month for their vote on an income tax increase, and the Senate passed SB 3 only hours after results of the second election became known. "The public perception is that it was retribution rather than redoing what was done wrong."

- Malapportionment. The Apol plan allowed a variance of 20,000 persons, or 15 percent, between the largest and smallest House districts — "not acceptable."

- Policy. The reapportionment issue has made the two parties extremely bitter toward each other, at least on major issues.

On the House side, John Bennett, D-Redford, also was looking to a compromise and admitted the Democratic caucus has mixed feelings. He summed it up: "The House is in disarray. The Senate is a disaster."

THE PARTIES have different feelings about the 1982 Apol reap-



Rep. Maxine Berman
keep 'em equal

portionment plan, named for the former state elections director appointed by the Supreme Court to draw up new districts.

Freshman Rep. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth Township, said the beauty of the Apol plan is that it made compact districts, lumping similar communities.

"People like seeing their local units of government no longer broken up," Law said. "It's harder to represent a district that goes all over the place."

His predecessor was Roy Smith, a Republican from Saline, a small city south of Ann Arbor. Smith's pre-1982 district excluded Ann Arbor circling the university town to pick up part of Plymouth Township. The other part of Plymouth Township was represented by Tom Brown, D-Westland.

Law said many outstate Democrats share his view, which is why they, too, are cool toward redistricting.

"PEOPLE AREN'T concerned many times about whether their representative is a Republican or Democrat. They're concerned about whether they're city people or township people," he said.

Law was interviewed during a holiday luncheon in his Capitol office. Almost as he was speaking, the Michigan Townships Association was mailing out an entire magazine edition devoted to how townships should resist annexation by cities.

Currently, Law's 38th House District includes Plymouth and Plymouth Township, Northville and Northville Township and three-fourths of the population of Canton Township — five communities almost all of which are in Wayne county. A small part of Northville is in Oakland County.

Under the new Democratic-sponsored redistricting plan, Law would lose part of Plymouth Township and some of Canton Township and pick up some of Northville, half of Novi and all of Novi Township — seven communities in two counties.

Even if districts under the Apol plan are unequal in size, Law said many people prefer the compact districts with residents of similar interests — the kind of districts Apol created.

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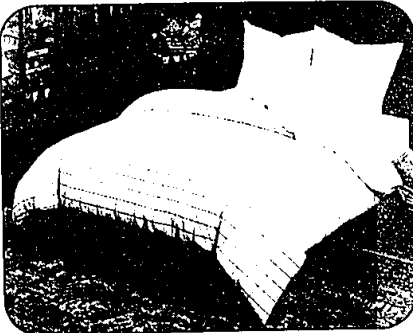
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