

Poor health keeps Moffitt out of race

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

A last-minute decision propelled Lillian Moffitt into politics. And her 12-year government career ended as suddenly.

Just one week before the election filing deadline, the vice chairwoman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners confirmed rumors that health problems are forcing her retirement.

"It's one of the toughest decisions I've ever made, but I must face reality," the soft-spoken commissioner told fellow Republicans during a caucus Thursday as she announced she wouldn't seek re-election.

"But remember, I'm going to be here six more months. I'm a lame duck, but not a dead duck."

REMINISCING about her career, Moffitt said the decision was as sudden as the one which got her elected. Three days before the filing date in 1972, friends talked her into running for office.

"Two weeks ago, I would have bet you \$1,000 I'd run again," said the Bloomfield Township resident, whose attorney son David is considering running for her 15th District seat.

The district includes the southwestern portion of Bloomfield Township, Franklin Village, a corner of West Bloomfield Township and about nine square miles of Farmington Hills.

"My number one priority is to regain my health."

THE FIRST WOMAN Republican caucus leader and board vice chair, Moffitt is an important party leader, although she has never become chair of the full 27-member board.

"She'll be hard to replace," said chairman Richard Wilcox, a Republican who has worked closely with her for seven years. "She's cooperative, efficient and a big asset to Oakland County."

She is one of the best-read members of the board and discusses an issue after heavy preparation. She has been a champion of the executive system and strong supporter of County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

That hurt any hope she had of being board chair. Other members — both Democrats and Republicans — saw her as too subservient to the executive.

THERE WAS a time when politics was the last thing on her mind. In fact, Moffitt didn't even join a party until a precinct captain called her about a contest. A former technical writer for the U.S. Army and Redford Township teacher, Moffitt was home caring for her only child.

"I thought I was an independent and was surprised to find I was Republican," recalled the commissioner, who started attending meetings of the Bloomfield Republican Women's Club.

In 1971, as the club's issues chairwoman, the DePaul University graduate began observing the county commissioners regularly. She shudders as she recalls the experience, remembering commissioners who appointed themselves to better-paying jobs or named unqualified friends to top positions.

"We were appalled at some of the things that happened. Our women were so upset that they decided to recommend highly qualified candidates."

CONTENT TO work behind the scenes for other candidates, Moffitt was asked by friends to run for county commissioner. It was the Saturday before filing deadline and a complete surprise to her.

"They felt I was qualified, was deeply involved in the community and said they would back me," said the commissioner. "I was stunned."

"But there was no question in my mind I could do the job from what I'd seen."

After calling some community leaders — who also said they would support her — Moffitt decided to go for it. And

she won her one and only primary — against three men. She has not just one tough race ahead.

"I was just a little community volunteer, a little lady from Bloomfield. It surprised everyone when I won," she said with a big smile.

QUICKLY MAKING herself known with a move to ban commissioners from appointing themselves to county administrative jobs, Moffitt became the first woman caucus chair in 1976 and board vice chair in 1977.

Her biggest task was presiding over the county's transition to a unified form of government. "It was quite a stormy year and my biggest challenge," she said of the time when many departments were placed under the new county executive.

As a board member, Moffitt has been vocal on many issues. She advocates "affordable, realistic" public transportation for the handicapped, indigent and senior citizens; protecting land and efficient, low cost government.

But her statements are usually quietly spoken and precise, with no grandstanding.

"I'm a private person. I've never been here on an ego trip," said Moffitt, who defended the closed caucus meetings which were allowed before the Open Meetings Act.

PRIDING HIMSELF on reacting to facts rather than "gut feelings," Moffitt admits to losing her temper "once, twice — well, maybe three or four times."

"Sometimes it's hard, but it doesn't help matters." And she enjoys phone calls from constituents, who dial her at home. "It's a wonderful thing to be able to help individuals who are helpless and don't know where to turn," she said, acknowledging that "this reminding is difficult for me."

The commissioner said she has no plans beyond making the most of her final six months in office, adding: "There's an awful lot to do between now and then."

WSU board approves fall tuition freeze

The Wayne State University Board of Governors has approved a tuition freeze for 25,000 of the university's 30,000 students.

Tuition rates in 1984-85 will be the same as they were in 1983-84 for graduate and undergraduate students. For the 2,000 students in law and in the

medical programs, rates will increase 2.5 percent next fall.

For freshmen and sophomores, annual rates remain at \$1,760 next year. Juniors and seniors will pay \$2,050.

Master's-level students

will pay \$2,045, and Ph.D.-level students will pay \$1,592. The new rate for fulltime law students is \$3,108. For the M.D. program, it is \$5,380.

THE BOARD also approved a recommendation of WSU President

David Adamany and the University Council to increase degree opportunities for students who hold technical degrees from community colleges.

The new policy does not itself create new programs. Rather, it allows

the faculty to develop what are called "two-plus-two" programs — two years of university work that complement two years of work in a

community college. THE BOARD approved a number of contracts with private corporations to provide services to students.

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