

Nystrom keeps Lucas in hot water

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

Almost all Michigan's leading Democratic officeholders were on hand for the state convention. And most made it across the stage at one time or another.

But Wayne County Executive William Lucas watched from the back of Cobo Hall's Riverfront Ballroom.

A lifelong Democrat, Lucas wasn't on the roster — which included other notables like Mayor Coleman Young, Wayne Sheriff Robert Ficano, Secretary of State Richard Austin and Attorney General Frank J. Kelley.

But the county executive was on the agenda in some district caucuses because of an attempt by the 15th District to censure him for conduct unbefitting a party member.

"My view is that the Democrats are going to have a tough fight — and all of us should have a role to play," Lucas said, adding he is "past the point of being emotionally involved, hurt by it."

"This is a grown up world and the Democratic power structure doesn't include the county executive."

"But what little the party asks me to do I will continue to do."

A RESOLUTION CENSURING Lucas was presented during Aug. 18 Democratic district conventions to members of the 15th District. The district takes in western Wayne County and a third of Washtenaw County.

The resolution took Lucas to task for "conduct and actions detrimental to the interests of the Michigan Democratic Party and its members."

Chairman Tom Anderson of the 15th District said there was an attempt to "discredit" the four of five people who were behind the effort.

While Anderson believes the proposal then disappeared, Lucas' staff members were told it was talked about during some convention caucus meetings.

BEHIND THE RESOLUTION is concern by Wayne County Democrats that Lucas is not making enough job appointments from their ranks.

"His (Lucas') first consideration is competence. And I agree," explained Anderson, a Southgate resident. "But if there are competent people in both

parties, his loyalty should be with the Democrats."

Anderson said there also is objection to the executive's proposed closing of Wayne County General Hospital in Westland. The facility has been leased to Southwest Detroit Hospital Corp.

Other concerns apparently are Lucas' reliance on staffer Dennis Nystrom, an Oakland County attorney active in Republican politics and the executive's recent appearance at an event honoring President Ronald Reagan.

All these things contributed to the resolution. The primary concern is that Lucas is creating problems with Democrats throughout the city and suburbs. The thought is that he's ignoring his supporters."

Anderson, who has talked with Lucas about the concerns, said it did not surprise him that the executive wasn't up on the convention dais.

"I think it would be a little rift if he had been up there. Some people would have felt it was a slap in the face," the district chairman speculated.

LUCAS ALSO was not surprised that he was not up at the podium. "Politics is a grown up person's game, and the people who are leaders decided Wayne County executive is not a very important job," he said.

"I don't agree with them. I feel what I've done here a party would be proud of. They are the kinds of accomplishments I think any political party would embrace with pride."

Lucas said there have been Democratic objections to his fiscal moves like the plan to close the hospital.

"I took a debt-ridden county and made it fiscally responsible," he said.

"I resent those people who seem to abrogate the position of fiscal integrity and give those qualities to Republicans. If you use taxpayers' money wisely you benefit your constituents and Democratic Party has always been the party of the people."

"Those are Democratic principles."

TO THE CHARGES which brought about the resolution, Lucas said Nystrom is the only "known" Republican in his administration. "The main criteria is competence and the majority of the

people in this county are Democrats, and I have appointed Democrats," he explained.

"Maybe they aren't people who went to San Francisco for the convention. But no one has to show a card to work in this office."

The executive said he attended the Reagan party because he was invited and went out of politeness and because it might help his constituents if he attended.

"I was brought up in an era of respect for authority. It would be bad manners not to attend," said Lucas.

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— William Lucas

"It would be violating my own personal code of conduct, which is to have good manners and respect."

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