

GOP rally

Candidates court 2,000, take blasts at Blanchard

By Teri Bañas
staff writer

The leader of Michigan Republicans, Spencer Abraham, opened last weekend's convention-rally in Kalamazoo by announcing, "It's up to us to keep the heat on Jim Blanchard."

The GOP gathering did just that. More than 2,000 attendees heard blistering personal attacks on the Democratic governor, name calling, and public policy criticisms. But the primary purpose was to unite the party faithful for the state elections this year and for the national political campaigns in 1988.

To that end, the four declared GOP candidates for governor signed a unity pact to steer clear of attacks on one another, and district chairmen worked toward grass roots construction.

EVEN SO, commitments soon were becoming widely discussed from 10 of the state's 18 congressional district chairmen who pledged to back one candidate — Wayne County Executive William Lucas.

Lucas received the loudest and longest applause from the conventioners. He started his organizing more than a year ago as he traveled across the state to visit each of the 83 counties, switching political parties only in May.

In contrast, Lucas' counterpart in Oakland County, 40-year Republican veteran Daniel Murphy, announced his candidacy for governor only last week, getting a later start on the hoopla, but promising to increase his name recognition.

RICHARD CHRYSLER, a Brighton auto industrialist, launched a race last month that was immediately infused by a take-notice \$326,000 television advertising campaign.

He soon began picking up supporters among those enamored with the ads' storytelling of the rags-to-riches, janitor-turned-millionaire. Many conventioners said they found his lack of government experience appealing, and felt it was time a businessman ran things.

Then came John Laue, the protest candidate and self-dubbed "taxfighter," who arrived from Grosse Pointe with homemade signs and last-minute seating arrangements.

IN THE MIDDLE of it all, the possibility of a fifth GOP candidate emerged as state Rep. Colleen House Engler of Mt. Pleasant began spreading the word

that she could make a bid in the race, if finances looked promising.

Perhaps the most poignant of observations came from insurance executive Richard Headlee of Farmington Hills, the unsuccessful GOP nominee four years ago when Blanchard bounced into the governor's seat.

Headlee made no public supportive gestures to any of the candidates, though he helped convince Lucas to leave the Democratic Party, he used Chrysler's money-raising service, and he counts Murphy as a personal friend. Headlee said so much can change in the next few months.

"The Lucas people say they have 10 out of the 18 chairmen, but then they (party chairmen) don't always represent the overall impressions of the district," said Headlee, who wore lapel buttons for Lucas, Murphy and Chrysler in a neat row. "I'm a living example of that."

"Back in 1982 they had me in third place, but I was in first place by August. So, a lot can happen by then."

HERE'S how local congressional district party members and chairmen view the GOP candidates' strengths in their areas:

• 17th District — Constance Richards, a Royal Oak delegate, said there's strong Murphy sentiment in the district, most of which is in Oakland County. But she was immediately interrupted by a fellow delegate from Lathrup Village wearing a Chrysler campaign cap who asked, "Do you see what I'm wearing?"

The 17th District includes Southfield, Lathrup Village, Pleasant Ridge, Redford Township to Inster.

"It's true that in the Oakland County segment of the 17th District, there's support for Dan Murphy," Richards said. "But sooner or later, one will step out completely. But that hasn't happened yet. They haven't been clearly defined in people's vision."

• 18th District — Chairman Alan A. May said Murphy's forces are "well ahead," though a tight group of Lucas supporters exists. A Murphy supporter, May points to his vice chairwoman, Emily Sutton of Bloomfield Township, as supporting Lucas. The 18th District includes the communities of Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Rochester, parts of Troy and West Bloomfield Township.



The GOP candidates for governor were much in evidence at a weekend rally in Kalamazoo: Wayne County Executive William Lucas shakes hands with Brighton businessman Richard Chrysler. Oakland County Executive Dan Murphy and wife Carolyn, present a united front. Detroit engineer John Laue and his platform.



Politics has some lighter moments

The weekend gathering of Michigan GOP supporters in Kalamazoo, produced any number of lighter moments. Here's a few:

OAKLAND COUNTY'S prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson perhaps is best known around Michigan for his drive to place a death penalty proposition on the state ballot.

But his remarks at last weekend's convention reinforced his jokester image, which has gotten him into some hot water in the past.

At an opening banquet, Patterson had these bars to sling: Patterson said Oakland County Executive Dan Murphy's campaign style was like that of his late uncle — "three days after he died."

He compared protest candidate John Laue to the "last elephant in a parade. His insight is barely inspiring."

The prosecutor said Wayne County Executive William Lucas' widely publicized trips to outstate Michigan last year inspired the county commission to send him a postcard reading "Wish you were here."

Patterson, who said he likes the opportunity to divert from his "stern prosecutor image," said of Democratic Gov. James Blanchard: "He just doesn't look right up there. He reminds me of the guy who went up to visit the Capitol and got separated from his tour."

DICK CHRYSLER showed organizational ability and a bankroll. Chrysler set up his party camp in one of the finest locations at the Hilton convention site and served not just hors d'oeuvres and liquor but hand-scooped ice cream in multiple flavors.

The convention-goers enjoyed a simpler menu of beer and popcorn at Lucas' party site.

Many had trouble getting to Dan Murphy's hospitality party. It was located in several suites on the Hilton's sixth floor and a bottleneck at the first-floor elevator slowed upward-bound traffic. This caused some grumblings by those stuck on the first floor. Among those stuck was Murphy.

JOHN LAUE who barely got included in the convention activities after declaring his candidacy just four days earlier, moved right up to the front table at Friday's banquet. Just so everyone knew who he was, he brought with him the world's largest dinner card — a poster board with his name on it, which he placed right in front of himself.

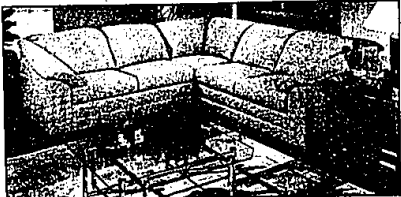
Ronna Romney introduced former UN Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick and quoted an unknown source as saying, "If brains were sexy, Jeanne Kirkpatrick would be the Sophia Loren of politics." She added, "No one ever says that about me."

Candidates' wives got some public exposure. Evelyn Lucas had some grassroots support among those sporting "Evelyn Lucas for First Lady" buttons.

Carolyn Murphy addressed the gathering on Saturday from Miller Auditorium on the Western Michigan University campus by saying, "Let me tell you about Dan the man, or Dan, my man." Seeming to enjoy the moment, she told how they met on a tennis court 45 years ago.

— Teri Bañas

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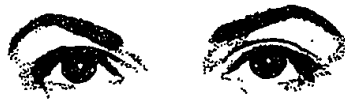
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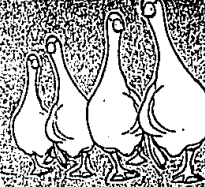
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