

# Precinct delegate: once forgotten, now wooed

By Teri Banaas  
staff writer

They have been known as the unsung heroes of party politics. The organizers of neighborhood fundraisers and kaffe klatsches, they are elected officials, yet few know that outside of their neighbors.

Yet, the influence that Republican precinct delegates carry is becoming heightened in Michigan these days with changes in the political process now emphasizing the "grassroots."

Evidence of that has become apparent in recent months with numerous visits to Michigan communities by U.S. presidential hopefuls for 1988.

One week ago national TV evangelist Pat Robertson held a GOP rally in Detroit's Cobo Hall to supposedly "test the waters" for his own presidential attempt while just two weeks ago New York Congressman Jack Kemp and the son of vice president George Bush both attended a suburban Canton Township rally to pump for supporters.

**MEETING THE TUESDAY** 4 p.m. filing deadline will assure who becomes listed on the state's Aug. 5 primary ballot for precinct delegate. Nominating petitions, signed by 15 registered voters, are due at county election bureaus.

At least among Republican voters, the process is an important first step toward the 1988 presidential contest. Delegates picked at that time will serve two years and move on to the spring statewide convention, serving to pick the national convention delegates for August 1988.

This process of selecting delegates has not been used by either party since 1972, and was changed because

of dissatisfaction in the outcome of the 1983 GOP Michigan primary, said state party chairman Spencer Abraham in a press release.

"In 1980 Michigan's Republican presidential primary was conducted in May. On that day, while George Bush was decisively winning that contest, television networks and news services were proclaiming that Ronald Reagan had secured enough delegate commitments to win the GOP presidential nomination," he said.

"Both then and now supporters of Ronald Reagan and George Bush have voiced frustration at this twist of events. For both sides, months of work and considerable cost have proved futile expenditures."

"The race was over before Michigan was counted. Moreover, by the time the race got to Michigan, other candidates had dropped from the race," Spencer said.

**PAT WIERZBICKI**, director of the GOP Headquarters in Oakland County, said: "There's been a tremendous amount of interest" among delegate hopefuls.

"The whole process has just been moved up two years. Normally, recruiting precinct delegates would have started in January or February 1988. But Michigan is now the first," she said in explaining the interest among presidential hopefuls.

In Oakland County, she said, there are 547 precincts, and most delegates are recruited by city-township directors acting as liaisons to the county organizers and the 49 communities in Oakland County.

She said those who have called the headquarters for information about the delegate process appear to be spurred on by focus on local elec-

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tions and the exposure of national presidential hopefuls.

In addition, political groups such as the Fund for America's Future and the Michigan Opportunity Society, already have full-time field workers and administrators working the state.

Wierzbicki said activity at the precinct level is tantamount to "earning your stripes" in the party structure and seeking elective office. "Starting at the grassroots and working up. That way they know how things work and how to run a campaign."

A political science professor with the University of Michigan - Dearborn, Ron Stockton, who has taught presidential delegate selections, says this process of selecting delegates is one way to get the effect of a "closed primary" where "Democrats vote for Democrats and Republicans vote for Republicans."

He gave as an example the politi-

cal catastrophe of the 1972 Michigan primary when Democrat George Wallace was staunchly opposed by organized Democrats yet was carried in the Democratic primary because of Republican votes.

"It can allow in candidates with either a lot of money (to buy media influence), advertising or someone with ill will. It can be divisive. You just can't have Democratic candidates picked by Republicans and Republican candidates picked by Democrats."

According to Stockton, the change in the selection process has meant that potential presidential hopefuls will have to work hard at organizing and winning support at the grassroots or precinct level, and less on last-minute media manipulation.

In the Democratic Primary this August, precinct delegates will also be selected but the National Democratic Party Committee's rules of

1984 call for a different method of selecting final presidential convention delegates.

Those who are selected from the Democratic ballot this August will serve as delegates to an upcoming county convention and subsequent state convention to select the party's nominees to local offices like secretary of state, attorney general, Michigan Supreme Court and university boards and the State Board of Education.

But in 1988 there will be a different plan for selecting delegates to the national presidential convention, said Democratic State chairperson Rick Wiener.

"Statewide 5-10,000 are selected. They're still our grassroots contact with the public at large."

Party chairman in the 2nd Congressional District, taking in Livonia, Plymouth and northern Westland, Orville Tungate, said he views the impact of the delegate selection this August as more on the "LaRouche scare. To prevent the LaRouche from making a big push in 1988," he said.

There are other ways precinct delegates have influence, he added. Sometimes, they carry particular influence in correcting problems with local U.S. representatives and also have "full voting rights" at local club meetings, he said.

A Livonia man who has filed petitions seeking nomination this August as a Democratic precinct delegate, though, said he just wants to get more involved in the party structure. "I've never met a LaRouche candidate, that's not my motive," said Dave Picard of Livonia.

He said he became involved because of his association with Robert Ficano's campaign for Wayne County executive.

"For a while I think both parties overlooked the precinct delegate. The Republicans had Reagan in office and weren't worried and the Democrats just got a Democrat in the governor's office a while ago."

"But now both sides are going to have to (rally precinct delegates) if they want to keep their people in office," he said.



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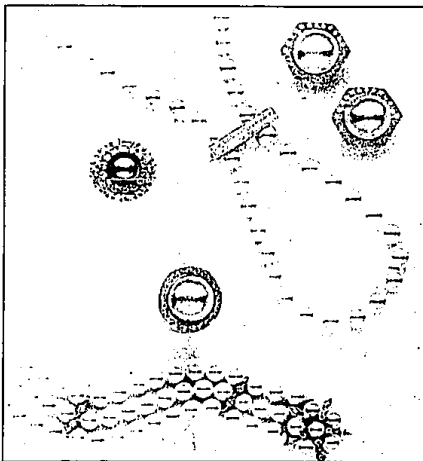
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