

# Blanchard's 2nd term: 'a bias for action'

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

A landslide is not a mandate. James J. Blanchard will have no blank check in his second term as governor of Michigan. He admits it.

Despite Democrat Blanchard's 800,000-vote plurality on Nov. 4, opposition Republicans retained 20-18 control of the state Senate.

And the programmatic Senate majority leader, John Engler, has his list of pet projects — property tax reduction, workers' comp rate cuts and product liability law changes.

That's typical of Engler. The 37-year-old career legislator from Mount Pleasant has had a comprehensive agenda and timetable, ever since he became majority leader after the 1983 recall of two Democratic senators.

His central theme is to make Michigan "competitive" in the national and international marketplace.

WHAT CAN be on Blanchard's 1987-90 agenda?

In his first two or three years, he offered a blitz of ideas for economic development.

For most of the last year, however,

## analysis

er, the governor has been strangely silent on new ideas and programs.

In his 1985 State of the State address, Blanchard repeated "more" or "continue" nine times, offering only two new programs: drunk driver check lanes (which a court promptly declared unconstitutional) and a college tuition investment plan, which Engler's troops have bottled up in the Senate Finance Committee.

His re-election campaign produced no new program promises. With a big victory under his political belt, is he just planning to juggle a few top officials and then, at age 44, coast on his laurels?

"EXPECT SOMETHING new," replied Joe Forbes, former state representative from Oak Park who now handles the governor's job training programs.

"We're still in economic development. You have to embellish on the ideas you have," Forbes said, adding that the administration's 1987 program



Gov. James J. Blanchard  
resting on laurels?

grams "are not totally formulated yet."

"Accountability," answered Betty Howe, director of the state Labor Department. This seems to be a code word hinting that Blanchard will seek greater authority over department heads. Some — such as the directors of Natural Resources and Agriculture — are picked by multitember commissions.

Howe added that the Youth Job Corps is to be a top program, along with help for Saginaw.

"They're closing a GM modular foundry; 1,700 will be out of work in 18 months," Howe said. "Doug Ross (Commerce director) is working a major initiative."

(She spoke election night. Two

days later, the No. 1 automaker announced it would shut down six Michigan plants and lay off 17,450 workers over the next three years.)

"Every person that needs to have help in placement will get it. It's help, not doing it for people," she stressed. A former Rochester resident, Howe was once Oakland County Democratic chairman.

ONE OFFICIAL, who asked not to be named because "he'll cut my tongue out," answered the question of Blanchard's priorities with his own question:

"Where is the biggest hurt in the state?" His own answer: "Detroit."

Blanchard has hardly mentioned Detroit problems in his first term, emphasizing his Oakland-Macomb political base. Rumors persist that Detroit Mayor Coleman Young is less than happy with Blanchard's attitude, despite the help the mayor gave the governor against Lucas.

In contrast, Republican Gov. William G. Milliken made major public efforts at helping Detroit with free-way patrols, Art Institute funding, Main Library funding, public transportation and other programs.

"But Gov. Milliken left a lot of unfinished business," said the Blanchard appointee, declining to discuss the subject further.

"STAY TUNED," advised state Treasurer Robert Bowman, Blanchard's top financial and policy adviser. "We have a bias for action."

Bowman said one matter of attention would be "how we ease the next downturn." That would square with Howe's indication of help for the Saginaw workers and with GM's announced closing of plants in Detroit,

Pontiac and Flint.

Michigan's economy usually runs into some economic bad weather every three to four years. A downturn is overdue.

A WARY observer is James Barrett, president of the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce.

If Blanchard's big win was an indication of his popular support, Barrett said, then the public also liked the work of Republican state senators in rolling back the personal income tax and fighting Blanchard over increased business taxes.

Business has dug in its heels against Blanchard's so-called "tax fairness package," which Barrett calls "Blanchard's tax increase program."

That package calls for homeowner property tax relief in return for business tax increases — bank deposits, insurance premiums and some computer software.

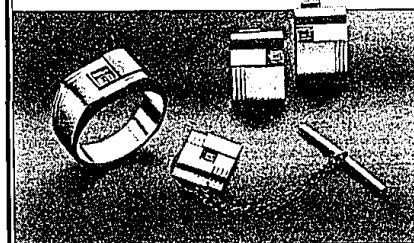
The chamber chief was pleased, however, at Blanchard's emphasis on job training initiatives.

Barrett detected in one campaign statement a hint that Blanchard would consent to modifying Michigan's definition of "disability" in the workers comp law.

BLANCHARD HIMSELF provided only a bare hint in his 10 p.m. election night victory speech.

The state's economy was his theme.

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