

Constituents must make the approach

By Alice Collins
staff writer

Should U.S. Rep. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, hear from his 18th District constituents at regular public hearings and town meetings like those held by U.S. Rep. Sander Levin in the neighboring 17th?

One area group — activists opposed to President Reagan's and Broomfield's positions on Central America — has been calling for such public hearings on that particular issue.

Levin, demonstrating an outreach approach, thinks public meetings are vital.

Broomfield doesn't think they're necessary and doesn't hold them. Constituents must contact him.

Broomfield, who describes the 18th as "a letter writing district," feels public meetings on specific topics, or for general discussions, aren't needed to keep him on top of the opinions of his constituents.

"I take very seriously the public opinions in the district. I've never taken that for granted," said Broomfield in a telephone interview from his Washington office Tuesday.

But daily visits to Washington by constituents, letters, twice-a-month weekend visits to the district and appointments with individuals at his Birmingham and Milford offices are enough to do the job, he said.

The 18th District runs west from Milford and Lyon as far east as Troy and north to Addison Township. In addition to Birmingham, it includes

West Bloomfield, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills, the villages of Franklin, Bingham Farms and Beverly Hills, Troy and Rochester.

"I THINK it would be a good idea to run an article and ask how they (constituents) feel about my keeping in touch," Broomfield said. "I think if you take a look at election results, they reflect that the people of the area are very satisfied (with his representation)."

In direct contrast to Broomfield's style of communicating with the people in his district is that of Levin, D-Southfield, in the 17th Congressional District.

Levin holds a series of 14 public meetings and seven "office-hour" sessions at community sites scattered throughout that district each year, according to David Plawewski, Levin's district administrator. "We vary the locations in an attempt to be as close to the people as possible," said Plawewski.

Levin also holds several other special programs and forums in the community. Most of the sessions are held on Saturdays and Sundays and draw an average 60-70 people. "We come away with six to seven new things to work on out of every meeting," Plawewski said.

"CONGRESSMAN LEVIN thinks it's very important for the people to have an opportunity to discuss current issues with him on a regular basis," Plawewski said.

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— U.S. Rep. Wm. Broomfield



"People are much more comfortable to be able to speak directly to him and not write letters," he said. "People can pose questions and hear his response directly. It helps him maintain a sense of what people are most interested in and gives him some idea of the areas he should focus his concern on in congress." Broomfield receives about 200 letters "on a wide range of issues daily," according to Jack Sinclair, his administrative assistant in Washington. "We get a lot of mail on the budget deficit and taxes. We also get a lot on things that aren't in the headlines, for instance animal rights legislation."

Because Broomfield is the top

GOP on the House Foreign Relations Committee and just served on the House Select Committee that investigated the Iran/Contra scandal, much of his mail this year has been on that issue, said Sinclair. "I think

we get a full picture of our district."

BROOMFIELD SAID the only request he's had for public hearings has come from the group opposed to the Reagan administration's policies in Central America. That group, many of the members who live in Broomfield's district, are represented by the Committee Against Military Aid to El Salvador, the Michigan Interfaith Committee on Central America and the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights.

The group has been staging protests at Broomfield's Birmingham office for many years and has sought meetings with him on many occasions to present its views.

Broomfield has met with representatives of the activists, but not as often as the groups have sought meetings.

"I'm very disappointed that he has not been willing to hold hearings in the district," said Rudy Simons of Bloomfield Township, a group spokesman. "It would expose different viewpoints on Central America,

viewpoints that have not been publicly heard in the district." Among those addressing such a hearing, said Simons, would be local people who have spent time in Nicaragua.

"It's clearly something he does not want to have a public discussion about," Simons continued. "He's not merely another voice in Congress, he's a leader in the Republican contra support."

WITH REGARD to the request, Broomfield said he has met with them and sees no need for public hearings on the topic. "This has been going on for years," he said. "I'm well aware of their feelings on the situation in Nicaragua."

There's no better source of information on foreign policy issues "than from the intelligence agencies of the United States Government," he added.

"I respect public opinion, but it comes down to I'm always going to do what I think is best for our country."

Forums will spotlight Constitution

"The Right To Bear Arms," a community forum, will launch the Farmington area's observance of the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

The controversial afternoon is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 24, at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills.

This will be the first of a series of forums on modern day constitutional problems in which the community can participate. Scripts have been crafted by the American Bar Association; they take the form of a trial with the audience as the jury. At the end of the afternoon, the audience will vote on whether the defendant is or is not guilty of violating the U.S.

Constitution.

Farmington-area residents will portray the roles in the scripts. Four witnesses to be cross-examined in the January forum will be signers of the Constitution: Roger Sherman, James Madison, Sam Adams and Alexander Hamilton.

The cast of characters and the exact time of the forum, will be announced early in January by Tim Koerner, Oakland Community College professor of history, on the committee for the first presentation.

Other forums, to be given during 1988-89, focus on the right of sanctuary; should judges be subject to recall; corporal punishment in prisons;

surrogate mothers and the right to procreate; the limits of religious expression; and school-sponsored Christmas programs, among others. All will be portrayed by Farmington-area citizens in local settings.

The Farmington Area Committee on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution is composed of representatives from the historical commissions of Farmington and Farmington Hills, the Farmington Public Schools, Oakland County Community College, service clubs and patriotic organizations.

If your group does not yet have representation, call Jean Fox, chairman, 477-6938.

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