

These Democrats seek shift to mainstream

By Wayne Peel
staff writer

Call them mainstream Democrats, or neo-liberals — call their programs progressive or regressive — members of the Democratic Leadership Council are battling for the heart of their party in 1992 and beyond.

With a membership list including Michigan Gov. James Blanchard, senators Sam Nunn, Chuck Robb and House leader Richard Gephardt, the group has amassed a heavyweight roster of party leaders.

Now, it seeks to take its message to the voters — specifically middle class suburban voters with household income between \$20,000 and \$50,000.

"THESE PEOPLE are the key," said DLC executive director Al From, in town Tuesday for an address to Oakland County Democrats.

"We need to attract people who vote Democratic in state and local elections, yet vote Republican in national elections."

To do so, From said, the organization seeks to maintain traditional party commitments to economic op-

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portunity and civil rights, but with a twist.

"Philosophically, we believe that if you enjoy the benefits of living in America, you should be willing to put something back," From said. "It's the kind of thing John F. Kennedy was talking about."

National service, having young people voluntarily perform various community improvement tasks in return for college aid, is one way group members seek to put their philosophy into practice.

"In a sense, it's a replacement for the military," From said. "Traditionally, the military has been a way for people from poorer backgrounds to work their way up, but now we're cutting troops."

Health care service, especially for the elderly, is one aspect of the

group's national service plan. Boosting local police forces through members of a national police corps, trained in an ROTC-like program, is another aspect. (For more on where the DLC stands with regard to the issues, see related story.)

DLC members will meet in New Orleans on March 23-24 to "form a new national consensus," said From, an Indiana native and former political strategist for the Carter White House and director of the House Democratic Caucus.

The national consensus, he said, would replace the special interest group politics that has dominated recent Democratic politics.

That idea attracted Birmingham businessman Marvin Meltzer to the group.

"It's a common-sense approach,"

Meltzer said. "Rather than going from interest group to interest group, we have a national consensus to guide us."

At the national strategy session in New Orleans, Nunn will outline a plan for U.S. aid to emerging democracies and Sen. Albert Gore, D-Tenn., will deliver the group's proposal on cleaning the environment. But recapturing the White House won't be far from anyone's mind.

"It's the president that sets the national agenda," From said. "If we are to have any influence, we must recapture the White House."

Attaining power won't be easy, even within the party itself.

Police unions have already announced opposition to the "police corps" proposal.

Meanwhile, the sole Democratic presidential contender with a national constituency, to this point, is the Rev. Jesse Jackson — whose liberal politics, seemingly pointing the way back to the entitlement programs of the 1960s and 1970s, is the exact opposite of what the DLC seeks.

Sull, DLC members believe the charismatic Jackson is vulnerable.

To beat Jackson, you have to attack him the way you would any



Birmingham businessman Marvin Meltzer (left) and Democratic Leadership Council executive director Al From are among those pushing for a new "mainstream" Democratic Party. From addressed Oakland County Democrats during an appearance this week.

other candidate." From said. "You have to make him defend his record."

Another potential roadblock is whether the DLC's issue-oriented Please turn to Page 9

Dems show Hart, determination at county dinner

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Jane Hart, widow of Sen. Phil Hart, has never been shy about her Democratic leanings.

Thus it stands to reason she'd come out of a self-imposed exile in the Caribbean to endorse a candidate Democrats view as a rising star.

This one happened to be her nephew, Walter O. Briggs IV, who has a decidedly uphill battle against incumbent William Broomfield, the most senior Republican in Congress.

In a rare public appearance Hart endorsed her nephew and other Democratic candidates during the 30th Annual Phil Hart Dinner Sunday at Roma's of Bloomfield. About 1,100 people attended the \$35-per-person fund-raiser.

Jane Hart — who was arrested for protesting the Vietnam War — has shunned the public limelight since her husband died in 1976. But she came back to help her nephew ... and put some spirit in the Democratic party.

TRADITIONALLY REPUBLICAN Oakland County has been the victim of old and stodgy practices, something young Briggs can help change, Hart said.

Briggs, 33, is the great-grandson of Walter O. Briggs, former owner of the Detroit Tigers. He was also a staunch Republican, Hart said, as were Walter O. Briggs the second and third.

"It took (the Briggs family) three generations to get their eyes open," she said, referring to her nephew's choice to run as a Democrat.

Hart's talk was preceded by several speakers, including Gov. James Blanchard and Sen. Carl Levin who could both face serious challenges this fall. Blanchard's most likely opponent is GOP Senate Majority Leader John Engler while Levin will face the winner of the primary between Bill Schutte and Clark Durant.

To the delight of the partisan crowd, however, the speeches were short, with Blanchard and Levin saying they are ready to run on their records.

In keeping with the festive evening, Blanchard said an Oakland County man, Dwayne Stephens of Ferndale, scored the winning basket at the Michigan State-Purdue basketball earlier in the day. Blanchard graduated from MSU. Levin said the easing of tensions in Europe should enable the United States to divert money from mili-

tary to domestic spending.

He derided "gadgets in the sky," a reference to the Star Wars defense system, and said it is time to put more money into the environment, education and other programs to strengthen the nation.

Levin said he is heartened about being "targeted" by Republicans, a reference to GOP claims he can be defeated, despite being an entrenched incumbent.

"IF I WASN'T targeted by Republicans, I'd wonder what I had stood for over the last 12 years," Levin said.

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...Guv serves up humor

Once a boss, always a boss, according to Gov. James Blanchard, who took a good-natured jab at U.S. Rep. Sander Levin at the 30th Annual Phil Hart Dinner at Roma's of Bloomfield.

Blanchard was obviously in a good mood Sunday, fresh from seeing his alma mater, Michigan State, win the Big 10 basketball title by defeating Purdue 71-70 in the final seconds of the game.

In a festive mood, he poked fun at Levin, the man who twice ran for governor and twice lost close elections to incumbent William Milliken before subsequently being elected in the 17th Congressional District that includes Southfield and Redford Township in Wayne County.

Noting that he worked in his 1970 campaign (as a paid outside coordinator) Blanchard said Levin demanded a lot from him and other workers. Furthermore, his former boss seems to maintain some of their old employer-employee relationship.

"SANDY STILL thinks I work for him," Blanchard quipped.

"And he thinks Carl works for him, too," the governor said, referring to U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, Sandy's brother, who was a volunteer in Sandy's successful campaigns for the state Senate in 1966 and 1968.



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HUDSON

A GOPer or 2 seen among the Dems

Democrats weren't the only ones courting goodwill Sunday at the 30th annual Phil Hart Dinner.

State Sen. Rudy J. Nichols of Waterford Township and Rochester District Judge James P. Sheehy were there, pressing the flesh and exchanging views on a wide range of topics including judicial system and politics in general.

Both are among the growing number of candidates vying in the Aug. 7 primary. At least six candidates are said to be considering bids, with the top four vote-getters campaigning in the November election for one of two newly created judgeships on the Oakland Circuit Court.

Nichols, a Republican, was elected to the state Legislature 1982 and

was considered almost unbeatable by Democrats.

"Judgeships are a non-partisan position," Nichols said when asked about a Republican swimming in Democratic waters.

"I think most of the people here will put aside any partisan feelings when they consider me or anyone else for a judicial post."

Sheehy is already in a non-partisan position. He's a judge in District Court 52-3.

Even though he hasn't formally announced his judicial candidacy (he's scheduled a press conference today), Sheehy had a billboard in Roma's parking lot and a table of literature touting his legal background on the inside.