

Resignation rumors fly as Murphy recovers

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy is recovering from the apparent stroke that led to his hospitalization Saturday.

But speculation abounds about who might replace Murphy if bad health were to persuade the 67-year-old executive to resign.

"I don't have any indication that he (Murphy) won't be back," Deputy Executive Patrick M. Nowak said Tuesday. "As a matter of fact, we've talked about county business during some of the time he's been in the hospital."

"That doesn't sound like a man who's thinking about stepping down," said Nowak, a key Murphy aide since the mid-1970s and one of several possible successors.

Murphy was taken to St. Joseph Mercy Hospital by ambulance from the Deer Lake Racquet Club in Clarkston where he and his wife Carolyn were attending a dinner for the hospital.

A physician at the dinner, Dr. Robert Nestor, called the ambulance after taking Murphy's blood pressure. Nestor had noticed Murphy having difficulty using his right hand and the executive was reportedly slurring some of his words.

A STATEMENT from the executive's office said Murphy's attending physician, Dr. Lionel Gillas, expects full recovery.

Nowak said the executive's office has been deluged with calls from people inquiring about Murphy. "As far as I'm concerned, he's still very much in charge," said Nowak.

Asked if he has heard discussion about Murphy stepping down, Nowak said, "Not that I'm aware of. Any discussion like that is premature."

Nowak and others are very much aware, however, of rumors that Murphy, Oakland's only executive since the position was created in

1974, will not seek re-election when his term expires in 1992.

Nowak has previously said he may run for the post. Others who have expressed interest are former county prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson and state Sen. Doug Cruse, R-Troy.

All three must any discussion about Murphy resigning is "speculative and premature."

Yet such discussion is plausible. As one confidant put it, "He (Murphy) has been in county government for 16 years. Nobody would blame him if he wanted to smell the roses for awhile."

"He wouldn't be hurting financially and he's got grandkids all around the country."

THE CONFIDANT asked not to be identified. "We all wish him the best of health and quick recovery," he said. "Although everyone would understand if he (Murphy) decided to step down, nobody wants to speculate about it because they might be seen as a pack in the wings."

Ironically, one of the things that

might prompt Murphy to stay in office is the recall pending against him from the Oakland County Taxpayers Association, according to County Commissioner Donn L. Wolf, R-Farmington.

"That (the recall) is the kind of thing that would get Dan mad," said Wolf, a political ally of Murphy's and a personal friend. "He's a fighter and I doubt if he would step down with that pending."

That recall effort got the green light during a five-minute hearing before the Oakland County Election Commission Tuesday. (See related story.)

If Murphy were to resign, the 27-member County Board of Commissioners would appoint a successor who would serve until the next election in 1992, according to Jack C. Hays, corporation counsel who said he had previously researched the topic.

If commissioners were to pick a successor, most say it would be between Nowak and Patterson. In any contest between the two, Patterson

is believed to have an advantage because of his high visibility and strong name identification with voters.

MURPHY, HOWEVER, is believed to favor his assistant. At a meeting last year Murphy reportedly said Oakland's next county executive should not be a politician "like Brooks Patterson, but an administrator like Pat Nowak."

Murphy, a resident of Sylvan Lake, was chairman of the Oakland County Board of Auditors prior to becoming county executive in 1974.

Murphy won't challenge recall language in court

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

The taxpayers group irked at County Executive Daniel T. Murphy will wait about 10 days before beginning to circulate recall petitions, according to its chairman, Dominick Vincenzini of Oxford.

But the delay will have nothing to do with the apparent stroke the executive suffered over the weekend, Vincenzini said Tuesday.

"Murphy has 10 days to challenge the recall in court," Vincenzini said after a hearing on the recall petition

by the Oakland County Election Commission. "Once that's past, we expect to get started."

At Tuesday's hearing, the commission ruled language on the proposed recall petition is sufficiently clear that people reading the petition can be expected to understand its intent, said Probate Judge Eugene A. Moore, chairman of the commission. A similar hearing on a recall petition against County Commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham, was rescheduled for Jan. 17. Moore said the commission is not empowered to make any determination

on the validity of statements made on the recall petition, but only on the clarity of the language.

The hearing began promptly at 8:30 a.m., and concluded within five minutes. Vincenzini, who was waiting in the hallway, was coming into the courtroom as commission members were leaving.

The duration of the hearing is at least partly attributable to the fact that the target of the recall, Murphy, did not challenge the clarity of the petition wording.

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