

Cruce resignation shakes up Oakland politics



FILE PHOTO

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The future of Oakland politics was turned upside down Tuesday when Doug Cruce stunned colleagues with his resignation from the state Senate.

Cruce, R-Troy, left to take a "lucrative and rewarding job" — president of the Michigan Insurance Federation.

The 43-year-old lawmaker was only three months into his third Senate term at his departure. He had widely been expected to seek higher office — perhaps U.S. Rep. William Brounfield's 16th Congressional District slot, possibly Oakland County executive, maybe lieutenant governor in 1994. He even had figured his speculation about a U.S. Senate run.

"I never considered the Legislature a career position," he said in an interview. "I quite frankly had considered another office. But there were a lot of 'ifs' and 'maybes' in taking higher office."

CRUCE, A former Marine sergeant and real estate broker, collected a deskful of political chits that he could have called on in a bid for higher office.

He personally had managed the 1988 campaign of prosecutor Dick Thompson, had been visible supporting people for local offices, and had done scout work for the GOP national convention delegation to gain experience and friends.

Cruce wouldn't reveal the salary the 23-company insurance federation is paying to induce him to leave

the \$45,200 Senate post, indicating only that "it's a good deal." But a former legislator and knowledgeable lobbyist said the job would probably pay between \$125,000 and \$150,000 a year.

"This is coming more abruptly and sooner than I expected, but it's time for me to move along," Cruce said. "The timing isn't all that great."

But at an 11 a.m. press conference at the state capitol Tuesday Cruce admitted, "I went to the federation. It would have been worse if they had approached me."

He has signed a four-year contract with the Lansing-based federation, and said Tuesday that he has no intention of running for higher office.

When asked if his leaving had anything to do with legislative pay, he said, "I have never complained or been dissatisfied."

He vacates the chairs of two key Senate committees:

• Commerce, which handles controversial insurance and business legislation.

• Local Government and Reapportionment, which will redraw Michigan's congressional and legislative districts.

IN THE INSURANCE post, Cruce will do public affairs, lobbying and education work for a trade group serving property and casualty companies, including all auto insurers except AAA.

"They needed a good war horse to do battle," he said, anticipating major fights over the causes of auto insurance increases.

Cruce said he decided two weeks ago — at the Senate's Easter break — to take the post and spent the time "mulling it over."

He announced his resignation minutes after the Senate began its 10 a.m. session Tuesday. It took effect at 5 p.m. Tuesday.

"I couldn't go back and be voting

on legislation for three days," he said in explaining the abruptness of his departure.

ENGLER WILL call a special primary and general election to fill the vacancy.

Staff writer Amy Rosa contributed to this report.

Colleagues view his exit

By Tim Richard
staff writer

As Doug Cruce left through the state Senate door, most ex-colleagues gave him pats on the back. But a few gave him kicks in the pants.

Complained Sen. Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor: "He did a better job even than Joe Mack... in putting down women. It was only Sen. Cruce who ever called me to task as an errand child... who said he would send me to my room if I spoke up for my values."

"He is so committed, so sure of himself, that he came from his side of the chamber to my side and smiled as if he owed me no apology," said Pollack, a pro-choice voter on the abortion issue.

Pollack referred to Cruce as "that man — that handsome, tall and charming man," in an apparent attempt to mimic male chauvinists who think of women only in terms of beauty.

At a news conference later, Cruce,

now a lobbyist, smiled and quipped, "I have a fence to mend."

"On behalf of minimum wage earners, feminists, women, organized labor," said Sen. John Kelly, D-Grrosse Pointe, "I would like to sing, 'Happy Days Are Here Again.'"

The song is a Democratic favorite used in the campaigns of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Hubert Humphrey. Kelly tangled with Cruce on labor, "women's" issues and Job Corps funding.

SEN. JACK Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, emphasized his agreement with Cruce on home base issues.

"There's not an issue in Oakland County where we haven't been in agreement. On education, we've never differed," Faxon said, citing their fight against cutting school aid.

"What he got done for Big Beaver Road I couldn't get done for Twelve Mile," he added with both admiration and envy.

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Hopefuls line up for seat

By Amy Rosa
staff writer

State lawmakers haven't had this much to gossip about since John Engler trounced Jim Blanchard in the governor's race last fall.

But with word that state Sen. Doug Cruce was vacating his 16th district seat effective 5 p.m. Tuesday, everyone in the know has been abuzz with speculation. Who will run? Who will win?

Cruce announced early Tuesday that he would leave his seat for a more lucrative position with the Lansing-based Michigan Insurance Federation. (See related story.) Engler will most likely call for a special primary and general election to fill the post before summer, rather than waiting for the next regularly scheduled general election.

Cruce's district — considered a Republican stronghold — includes the cities of Troy, Birmingham, Clawson, Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, Pleasant Ridge and Berkley.

Of the names circulating as contenders, four — State Reps. Gordon Sparks, Shirley Johnson and Michael Bouchard, and Detroit attorney John Freeman — admitted "serious interest" in the seat.

A FIFTH, John Pappageorge, indicated mild interest, while other rumored contenders took their names out of the hat. Anyone living in Cruce's district is eligible for the seat.

"I'm gathering my thoughts as we speak, but I would describe myself as seriously interested," said Gordon Sparks, R-Troy, from a vacation spot in Florida.

"My office called me with the news this morning," he added, saying he was "very surprised" by the announcement.

Sparks, who is in his ninth year as representative of the 63rd district, still has some questions to ponder before committing to the upcoming race, he said. His district includes Rochester, Rochester Hills and northern and western Troy.

Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, said Tuesday she was "absolutely" interested in Cruce's post, but also hasn't made a definite decision yet.

Johnson, who is serving her sixth term as the 64th district representative, estimated candidates will have to spend "six figures" on the "short and intense" campaign.

STATE REP. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham — whose 65th district includes Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham — also is "very interested" in the post.

"Based on the encouragement of local elected officials and state legislators, I'm thinking about running. I'll probably decide within the next couple of days," he said.

On the Democratic front, Royal Oak resident Freeman is expected to make a try for Cruce's seat. He lost his bid for the position last fall.

Another Democrat rumored considering a try for Cruce's seat is former Michigan first lady Paula Blanchard, according to Donald Tucker, chairman of the Oakland County Democratic Party.

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