

Board to be selective for Lanni replacement

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Over the last five years, two of five Oakland County road commissioners have been subject to prison sentences.

Understandably, the people who appoint them — the Oakland County Board of Commissioners — plan to be more selective.

"We're going to take our time reviewing applicants," said Commissioner Roy Rewold, R-Oakland Township. "We want to get somebody with credentials" and integrity. Numerous people have expressed interest in the vacancy created on

the Road Commission of Oakland County by the resignation of James E. Lanni, 46, of Royal Oak.

Lanni, who faces a likely prison sentence after pleading no contest to charges he twice raped a 15-year-old babysitter, formally resigned Thursday in a terse letter to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. The resignation was an abrupt turnabout for Lanni, who earlier in the week notified commissioners he wanted to continue serving on the board, possibly until Sept. 24, when he is to be sentenced in Oakland Circuit Court.

Lanni's resignation — announced as commissioners were about to in-

'The job (of road commissioner) has gotten too big. There's too much money involved.'

— Commissioner Roy Rewold on selecting next appointee

tiate legal proceedings to oust him from the road commission — was willingly accepted. "That's a relief," said Commissioner Thomas A. Law, R-West Bloomfield, worried that a complicated legal dispute might be

needed to oust Lanni.

LAW AND FELLOW commissioner David L. Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills, are both lawyers. They were also concerned about the legal con-

cerns associated with removing Lanni for misconduct not related to his performance of duties — particularly when he pleaded no-contest. A no-contest plea is treated as an acknowledgment of guilt, even though the defendant does not admit the charges.

Even so, some commissioners were concerned the technical difference between the two pleas might create a loophole with which Lanni could contest his removal. Some, including the county's legal counsel, were concerned Lanni might be able to delay his removal for as long as a year, even though he would likely be in prison for some of that time.

Rewold, chairman of the board, dissolved all concern, however, when he announced that Lanni's resignation was effective "immediately." Lanni's salary, health insurance and other fringe benefits are stopped, he said. His county-owned car is being returned.

Lanni, who served on the county board of commissioners for 10 years, was appointed to the road commission in 1989, shortly after losing a re-election bid in 1988.

He is the second Oakland County road commissioner to run into serious trouble with the law within five years.

IN OCTOBER 1986, John Gnow Jr. of Bloomfield Township resigned from the road commission after pleading guilty in federal court to influence peddling. He was subsequently sentenced to federal prison.

Gnow ran a successful public relations firm when appointed to the road commission in 1975, as well as the finance chairman for Daniel T. Murphy's successful election bid for county executive the previous year.

In discussing a possible replacement for Lanni, Rewold did not mention Gnow. He merely said he and other commissioners intend to be "highly selective."

"The job has gotten too big," Rewold said, "there's too much money involved."

Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, said that means, among other things, less emphasis on political connections with more concern about expertise and competence.

"We want someone who knows roads," said Pernick, chairman of the Democratic caucus. "But we also want someone familiar with how things work in Washington and Lansing (two sources of road money)."

PERNICK SAID commissioners looked at merit — rather than political clout — in 1987 when they appointed Lawrence E. Littman to the road commission. He is now chairman.

Littman was active in government

in Troy and Republican politics in the 18th Congressional District before appointment to the road commission. He has a bachelor's degree in metallurgical engineering from the Carnegie-Mellon University and a master's degree in industrial administration from Purdue University.

Pernick said Democrats would not necessarily push for one of their own as a replacement for Lanni, although they have long held the three-member road commission should be bipartisan. "It's more important that Lanni's replacement is qualified than it is to be a Democrat."

Even so, Pernick said he knows of four Democrats that should be considered for the road commission. They are:

• Karry Kammer, an insurance executive and former state senator from Waterford

• Joe Forbes, former state representative from Oak Park

• Marty Hollander, a certified public accountant from West Bloomfield

Republicans already have several possible candidates, including:

• Ben Marks, a builder who has been on the Farmington Hills City Council for seven years, including one year as mayor.

• Mark Chester, a senior purchasing expediter for General Motors who last November lost his bid for re-election as a county commissioner from Troy.

• Richard D. Fessler, a former State Senator from Commerce Township who did not see re-election in 1990 and is now practicing law.

• Rudy Lozano, a Clarkston Realtor and accomplished GOP fundraiser.

• Robert Grunick, mayor of Auburn Hills, who was considered for appointment to the road commission last November, when commissioners instead reappointed Richard V. Voght of White Lake Township. John McDonald, a former county commissioner from Farmington Hills who had been mentioned as a possible candidate, said he is not interested in the post.

Commissioner John G. Pappageorge, chairman of the GOP caucus, said people interested in appointment should contact their county commissioner. Applicants will be evaluated by either the Democratic or Republican caucus before being reviewed by committees of the county board and voted upon by the entire board of commissioners.

The three-member road commission sets policy for improving and maintaining 3,000 miles of road in Oakland County. It employs about 540 employees and oversees a \$62 million annual budget.

GOP welcomes Murphy back to duty

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy received a warm round of applause when he walked into a Thursday caucus meeting before a Tuesday meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

It was the first GOP caucus Murphy has attended since Jan. 5, when he suffered the first of two disabling strokes that left him with slurred

speech and limited movement of the right arm and leg.

Murphy smiled and acknowledged the greeting from his fellow Republicans. He did not take the podium during the caucus or the two-hour board of commissioners meeting. But he talked privately with county officials and other well-wishers.

The 67-year-old executive still has

some difficulty talking. But he appears to have regained full use of his right arm and leg and has discontinued therapy.

"I've been in the office regularly," Murphy said. "Mostly on a half-day basis. But I've always been in contact."

Through much of his six-month disability Murphy was in contact

with his office via telephone. He also held staff meetings at his Sylvan Lake home.

"It's good to be back," he said.

Later in the day Murphy and his wife, Caroline, attended a fundraiser for Republican county commissioners at Roma Hall in Bloomfield Township.

Board for 'freedom of expression'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A student "freedom of expression" bill got a minor boost in Lansing with a 5-3 endorsement by the State Board of Education.

The bill would protect student publications, theatrical events, bulletin boards, petitions and buttons. It also would protect a faculty adviser from discharge or transfer by a principal seeking to "suppress or interfere with the free expression rights."

The action was good news in the office of state Rep. Lynn Jondahl, D-Oakemos, sponsor of House Bill 4665. The bill is still waiting hearings in the House Judiciary Committee, which could take place in the fall.

Among area lawmakers who are

co-sponsors are Democrats Justine Barns of Westland, James Kosteva of Canton, Maxine Berman of Southfield and Republican Jan Dolan of Farmington Hills.

"UNACCEPTABLE," said the two Republican members of the state board who voted on it.

"Freedom of speech stops sometimes, and young people need direction," said Marilyn Lundy of Grosse Pointe. "We give too much leeway or

harden to young people," she said, harking the trend for 20 years of "violence, promiscuity and drugs."

"It's unacceptable to eliminate (administrative) review," said Dick DeVos, Grand Rapids businessman who was picked for the ticket in 1990 by now-Gov. John Engler.

Democrat Guineo Salas of East Lansing voted no for the opposite reason. Board support was too soft, and constraints on free speech too large, he said.

THE BILL would make supervised students responsible for the content of publications, limited by the laws of obscenity, defamation and disruption of school conduct.

"They must have a faculty adviser," noted member Annette Miller, D-Huntington Woods.

"There's no problem. This bill is very carefully drafted."

"The school district has the opportunity to not sponsor a publication," added Barbara Roberts Mason, D-Lansing.

Also supporting the bill were President Dorothy Beardmore, R-Rochester Hills, Cherry Jacobus, R-Grand Rapids, and Barbara Dumouchelle, R-Grosse Ile.

THE BILL was sought by a statewide student press association, though it also applies to all forms of students' artistic and public expression.

It was prompted in part by the U.S. Supreme Court's "Hazelwood" decision. That decision allowed administrative censorship when a school publication is deemed a "supervised learning experience" rather than a public forum protected by the Bill of Rights.

Many school boards reportedly favor the Jondahl bill. But it is opposed by the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

School boards and administrators would be given protection from both criminal and civil liability for student expression — unless those governmental officials have "altered or interfered with the content of the

student expression."

An identical Senate bill (201) has had no committee action. It is sponsored by John Kelly, D-Grosse Pointe, and co-sponsored by David Hoenigman, R-West Bloomfield.

ON OTHER legislative bills, the State Board of Education took these positions:

• Supported HB 4419 (by Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield) to restore 872 million in categorical state aid to out-of-formula districts. Some 51 districts are suing to recover the money, which the Legislature first approved and then "recaptured."

The money has already been given to in-formula districts, and a Department of Education staff recommendation said there is no replacement money. Dobb's bill is co-sponsored by suburban Republicans Lynn Banks of Livonia, Michael Boucard of Birmingham, Tom Middleton of Orionville and Sparks of Troy.

On Page 38 of the Sears July 28-31 advertising section you may have received through the mail, there is an error. We incorrectly illustrated Freezer #20328. The item is available for purchase as described and priced. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused.

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