

# GOP committeewoman battle what they say between the lines

BY TIN RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

In a campaign of code words, three rivals are seeking to be Republican national committeewoman from Michigan.

Rarely does the public see a national committee member at work.

The job is fund-raising and bolstering the spirits of the party faithful.

Ronnie Romney of Bloomfield Hills emerged from the Headline for Governor campaign eight years ago to win the job. Seeking a third term, from delegates to the GOP national convention, she is being challenged by Betsy DeVos of Grand Rapids and Andrea Fischer of Birmingham.

There's no salary but some travel reimbursement. The GOP National Committee picks the national chair and sets the national budget. Members may do any number of jobs at the state level.

Delegates to the Oakland County GOP convention heard from the Romney, Fischer and a stand-in for DeVos. Here's what they said and, with the help of assorted delegates who asked to remain anonymous, the meaning of the code words.

"I had hoped I could run unopposed," said Romney, 48, emphasizing this would be her last term. She announced early so that successors can have "four years to prove themselves."

In the job you "drive and drive and drive and raise money. I invited some people to my house for dinner one night, and they asked, 'What would it cost?'

When her predecessor, Ramy Hieseler, left after 14 years, "she hadn't lost her luster, and neither have I."

*Translation: I've done the job at great personal sacrifice. I'm not over the hill. My rivals have yet to prove themselves.*

Betsy DeVos, 38, comes from the Grand Rapids political and business family. Her 1980 was Robert for President campaigner who stuck with the party.

The GOP needs candidates "who share our values." "The word 'values' is repeated later.

"Like each of you, I have distributed literature, put up yard signs, recruited volunteers, worked on the mailing of the code words."

Campaigns from local school board to president." DeVos emphasized her "grass roots experience" as a county and district party chair.

*Translation: My rivals' divorces lurk in the background. I started at the bottom, not the top. The religious role plays a role.*

Fischer, 38, of Birmingham, is a working mother (with a successful career), an attorney at Miller Canfield, an attorney says. She started by working on housing arrangements for the 1980 national convention in Detroit.

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raised money, spoke to groups.

"When Mat Dunakis came to me for help on his Senate race, I was there. That's why he's supporting me."

*Translation: When people ask me for help, I respond.*

*Translation: I'm wired to the current movers and shakers and can do the job you want better.*

*Prognosis: Young rivals don't want to wait for Romney to retire. Her divorce, after authoring pop psych books, has hurt.*

Gov. Engler is taking no part, a rarity for him:

DeVos has a handicap: The national committeewoman, Chuck Yeh, also is from Grand Rapids, and Republicans believe in geographic ticket balancing.

Romney could survive. But the clear lesson is that it's unwise to hang onto a political job too long.

Delegates elected at county conventions will attend a state convention May 29-30 in Detroit, to pick the national committee man and woman. (State chair David Doyle is the third Michigan member.)

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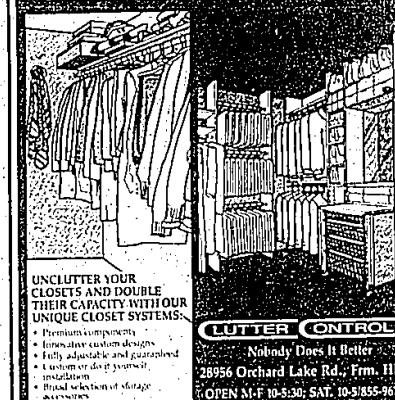
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