

House divided

County GOP has fences to mend

By WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

A house divided cannot stand. It's a warning that goes back as far as the Bible or, more to the point, Abraham Lincoln.

Area Republicans might do well to keep those words in mind as they try to minimize the damages from a series of sharp divisions.

No one expects Oakland to become a Democratic stronghold, but county Republicans are reeling from a series of highly public spats that threaten party harmony as this year's elections approach.

In the most recent rift, West Bloomfield Supervisor Sandra Draur led a contingent of party regulars calling for the resignation of county chairman James Alexander.

That event itself was the aftershock of a particularly bitter fight between two county Republicans over the state GOP committeewoman post.

The dispute centers on Alexander's support for challenger Andrea Fischer in a race against incumbent Ronna Romney.

"You can't have (county) party leaders campaigning for one Republican against another," Draur said. "If that continues, we will face a widening rift."

Alexander, whose term expires in

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December, vowed to stay on, calling his role in the committeewoman dispute minimal.

"What people haven't noticed is that the county organization really isn't involved in filling a post like this. It's more the job of (state party convention) delegates," Alexander said.

The party will come together, both agreed.

"We've had division in the past, not everybody is going to agree on every issue or on every candidate," Alexander said. "But the state of the Republican Party in Oakland County is strong."

To stay that way, however, Oakland Republicans will have to work through several other potentially divisive issues.

Here's a list:

- Further fallout from the committeewoman battle. Charges and countercharges of anti-Semitism abounded in the party insider struggle between incumbent Romney of Bloomfield Hills and key Engle/Bush fund-raiser Fischer of Birmingham. The issue is unpleasant at best, explosive at worst. Fischer and Alexander are Jewish,

as are many Oakland GOP members. The post ended up going to a third contender, Betsy DeVos of Grand Rapids.

- A red-hot congressional race.

For years, Republican congressional primaries were as exciting as watching suburban Oakland laws grow. No more. This time, 36-year incumbent William Broomfield is gone. This year's race, at least for most of Oakland, pits party wunderkind David Honigman against Joseph Knollenberg — Broomfield's hand-picked successor and a former county party chief — and pro-choice Alice Gilbert, a former judge. Households are divided, old loyalties strained.

"It's looks like it's going to be a hot one," Draur said. "But people do have the right to vote for the candidate of their choice."

- Fallout from this week's U.S. Supreme Court abortion ruling upholding Pennsylvania's abortion restrictions. Oakland is a hotbed for the pro-choice movement in general and pro-choice Republicans in particular. One group, Birmingham-based Republicans for Choice, formed several months ago, in anticipation of the high court ruling. Still, pro-choice Republicans find themselves increasingly in the minority of the national organization.

"We're disappointed with our leadership at all levels," organization founder Barbara Fanger said. "I think the problem has been that we've stayed quiet for too long."

Compounding matters is a different — some would say lesser — relationship with Lansing. Betsy DeVos's election as committeewoman continued the shift of state GOP power from the metro area to outstate. Despite his local support, John Engler is the first governor in three decades within initial power base outside metro Detroit.

Potential GOP divisions won't necessarily mean there will be more Democratic county officeholders.

L. Brooks Patterson remains the favorite to replace fellow Republican Daniel Murphy as county executive.

Even after redistricting, Republicans are expected to retain the bulk of Oakland state House and Senate seats, as well as continue their dominance of the commission and other county elective posts.

Rifts will be overcome, Alexander predicted.

"I think there's room for everybody," Alexander said. "I think we can live together under the same tent."

For now, though, not everyone is a happy camper.

County GOP candidate endorses Perot

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

He might not be a candidate yet, but Ross Perot might already have costails in Oakland County — at least as far as one candidate for county commissioner is concerned.

Businessman and self-proclaimed tax foe Raymond B. Dugan of Troy last week said he will endorse Perot for President.

Dugan, normally a Republican, said he is endorsing Perot — who is expected to run as an independent — because of his dissatisfaction with incumbent George Bush.

"The bottom line is George Bush lied," said Dugan, a vocal spokesman for the Oakland County Tax-

payors Association. "He lied about raising taxes. Who knows what else he's lied about."

Dugan, owner of Time Communications, Inc., which manufactures computer networking products, said he is backing the Texas billionaire because, "A lot of Republicans are as disappointed in Bush as I am."

Dugan is one of three Republicans and one Democrat running in the newly created 14th County Commission District that includes all of the city of Bloomfield Hills, part of Bloomfield Township and part of Troy.

His GOP opponents in the Aug. 4 primary are incumbents Marilyn Gusling and Nancy McConnell, who

formerly represented the 23rd District.

McConnell became a resident of the 14th District when all of Oakland County was reapportioned as required in conjunction with the 1990 census.

The lone Democrat running in the district is John M.H. Ulrich who will face the GOP winner in the Nov. 3 general election.

Dugan said he personally admires Perot because of his positive approach to addressing the country's problems. "We can't continue with business as usual," Dugan said.

His GOP opponents, however, suggest Dugan is bringing Perot into the race to pump up an other-

wise bland campaign . . . and because he doesn't have other issues.

"I don't see what Perot has to do with Oakland County," said Gusling. "Endorsing him is silly. I intend to focus on more important county issues like the solid waste program, the budget and addressing our mental health problems."

McConnell agreed. "We've got a lot of problems in Oakland County. As a commissioner, I've always talked about them."

Given Dugan's disappointment with Bush, however, McConnell suggested he distance himself from the incumbent President even more. "Maybe he ought to run as an independent instead of a Republican."



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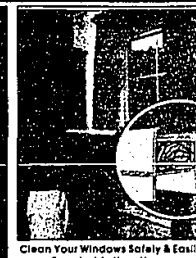
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