

'Greatest speech he's ever given'

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

HOUSTON — Michigan Republicans woke up Wednesday and found that good ol', folksy John Engler is a national figure.

"He gave lots of visibility to the state. Our governor was in the national spotlight," said Dennis Flessland of Huntington Woods, an alternate and district chairman.

"I was impressed that Michigan had that kind of firepower," said Art Sippola of Livonia, a state party officer. "How many speakers did we have up there — three?"

A tally of several delegates showed Michigan had no less than seven speakers on the Astrodome podium at this year's national convention: Engler talking autos, philanthropist Max Fisher on President Bush's friendship to Israel, Detroit Councilman Keith Butler on the platform, Teen Republican Michael Flury on youth, heritage leader Frank Stella on nationalities, Mary Fisher's testimonial on AIDS and lame duck Rep. Guy Vanderjagt on Congress.

Michigan Democrats had no one on the podium at their convention, though former Gov. James Blanchard had a major role inside the Clinton campaign.

"He (Engler) has a lot of clout with Bush's campaign," said Sean Cox, a first-time delegate from Livonia. "He's building a national reputation." Cox noted network figures like Ed Bradley and Dan Rather have been seeking out Engler.

Engler's Tuesday night speech was literally and metaphorically about autos, in the nnnnyx of one guest, Livonia city clerk Joan

McCotter.

Said the governor: "Michigan leads the way in making cars, and making cars drives the American economy. Making cars means jobs for Americans in the steel foundries of Pennsylvania, the textile mills of the Carolinas, the rubber industry in Ohio and the electronics laboratories of California...."

"Now let's look under the hood of the Clinton-Gore model. When you get past the slick paint job, here's what you find: \$160 billion in higher taxes... fuel standards that will cost 40,000 autoworkers their jobs in my state alone. Talk about sticker shock!"

"And for a model that only turns left?... And the Clinton model has already had a test drive — in Arkansas," he said, reciting Arkansas' low performance in workplace safety and school spending. "The 1992 Clinton-Gore model is no Lincoln; it's a lemon."

Yvonne Struther of Rochester Hills said, "If you're grading speeches, it was one of the better ones."

"Greatest speech he's ever given. He connected the different states," said Peg Sippola, a guest from Livonia.

Next morning Engler said he junked the first version of the speech. "When you've only got five minutes, you've gotta make every line work," he said. Communications director Rusty Hills said he, Engler and chief of staff Dan Pero worked on it, with Engler himself making major contributions.

"A sign of his respect at the national level," said state Rep. Susan Munnell of Howell.

Newlyweds met at '84 convention

HOUSTON — They met at the 1984 Republican convention in Dallas and now the newlyweds are still politicking here in 1992.

"Meet my husband, Jason Allen. We were married July 18," said the former Suzanne K. Miller of Farmington Hills.

Both were drivers at the '84 convention under the guidance of then state Sen. Doug Cruse of Troy — shepherding delegates, party faithful and the press from airport to hotel and back. Suzanne was a freshman at Wayne State; Jason a sophomore at Miami of Ohio.

They stayed in politics. Jason Allen makes his living in the family-owned menwear store in Traverse City and serves on the Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners.

Suzanne Miller Allen went to Lansing, first as a clerk in the Senate Commerce Committee but for the last year as administrative assistant to House minority leader Paul Hillebrands of Holland.

She's working hard. "We have an event Monday night," she said of the "Future Majority Celebration." Republicans are working to take control (56 seats) of the Michigan House for the first time since the 1960s.

She rattled off statistics on the House seat held for eight years by Democrat James Kosteva in Canton



Matchmaker: College students Suzanne Miller and Jason Allen, drivers at a previous convention, now are driving together through life.

Township. "It's Republican. It went 58 percent for the governor (Engler in the 1990 election)," she said. (Inside Michigan Politics, the political newsletter of Bill Ballenger, rates the district as only 46 or 47 percent Democratic now that it has shed the city of Wayne and

picked up Canton Township.) "Webb's seat is open, and that's Republican," Suzanne said of retiring Rep. Wilfred Webb, D-Hazel Park.

"People thought we were crazy, but we have a chance against the speaker (Democrat Lewis Dodak of

Birch Run in outlying Saginaw County)," said Suzanne, now a passenger on the Sheraton Crown Hotel's courtesy bus instead of a driver.

Jason Allen smiled. "I'm just coming down as a faithful husband," he said.



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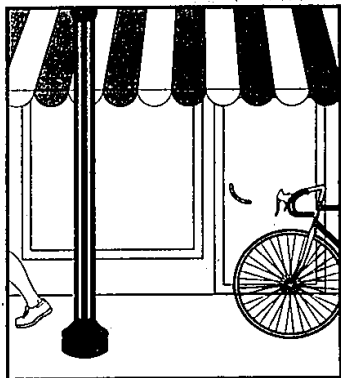
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