

County drain challenger runs to eliminate position

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County drain commissioner candidate M. Kay Brady sounds a little like H. Ross Perot.

Elect me, she says, and I'll quit. Well, it's not exactly that simple, but Brady's No. 1 campaign plank is that the drain commission office should be folded into the department of public works, and the boss of the resulting department should be appointed by the county executive, thereby eliminating the office of drain commissioner.

Asked by Oakland Democrats to run for county office, Brady said she was given a choice between county clerk and drain commissioner. "I selected the drain office because I thought it was that's where the similarity to Brady's plan ends."

Incumbent drain commissioner George Kuhn, 67, likewise wants to eliminate his position, but that's where the similarity to Brady's plan ends.

Since 1972 when he became drain commissioner, Kuhn has sought to make one department out of the drain office and the public works department. But under Kuhn's plan there would be an elected official called public works commissioner in charge of the new department.

Whoever the drain commissioner is at the time of the change would become the public works commissioner.

He calls that a common-sense plan that would save county taxpayers \$1.5 million in five years because duplication of services would be eliminated.

Brady calls it "empire building" and says her plan would make the drain commissioner more accountable to the county executive.

Kuhn agreed that under Brady's plan the drain commissioner, who is paid \$80,300 would be more accountable to the county executive, but only to the executive, not to the voters.

"I'm not building an empire," he said. "If I were I'd run for county executive. (Brady) is absolutely wrong. This is a cost-saving thing."

(If Kuhn and county executive candidate L. Brooks Patterson are elected Nov. 3 it's likely that the former will get his wish. Patterson has gone on record as favoring Kuhn's plan, which could have been implemented three times in years past but for the vetoes of executive Dan Murphy.)

Brady, 46, also charges that Kuhn is out of touch with reality, as is any long-time government official. "The longer you stay in government the less chance you have of staying in touch with what's really reality," she said.

"George is not doing any job," adding that chief deputy drain commissioner Robert Fredericks



JOHN STORMZAND/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

George Kuhn: The West Bloomfield resident is a Navy veteran. Before becoming drain commissioner, he was a Ford executive, mayor of Berkley and a state senator.



■ Kay Brady has a bachelor's degree from the University of Detroit in organization and human behavior and was for many years a lobbyist in Lansing and Washington D.C.

is really the guy who runs the drain office. Kuhn said, "that's untrue."

Brady likewise complains about storm drains in the southeast of Oakland County that can't keep up with large quantities of rain.

"Get a good rain storm and, heaven help us, you have to paddle home," she said. "That (drain) infrastructure is decaying (and) it has to be addressed now."

Kuhn said that, by law, the drain commissioner has to be asked by local governments to replace an old drain. If Brady is concerned about flooding in Huntington Woods (where she lives), Kuhn said, "what she has to do is convince her city council to petition the drain commission."

Brady grew up in a very Republican Grosse Pointe family, but "Ronald Reagan made me a Democrat and George Bush is making me a candidate." She has never run for office before.

"I have no desire to seek another political office after I lose this one, except maybe lieutenant governor," she said.

As for her chance of beating Kuhn, Brady is brutally blunt. "It's not going to happen," she said. "It's unrealistic."

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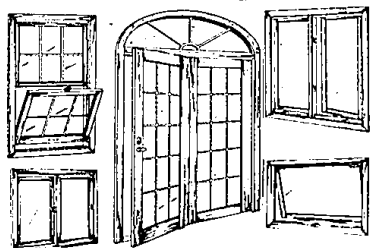
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