

Levin calls for renewed love affair with American car

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Big industry and big government have kissed and made up. "It's a new era of cooperation," said liberal Democrat Sander Levin, U.S. representative from Southfield for a decade, former legislator, and former county and

state chair of a party usually at odds with business.

But scratch President-elect Bill Clinton's idea for a corporate payroll tax, Levin said last weekend in an interview. The plan was to require business to "invest" 1 to 1.5 percent of payroll in employee skills upgrading, or pay the federal

government a tax to do it.

"They (Clinton's people) are revising that. The tax idea is out," said Levin, a member of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee.

President Bush had charged the \$150 billion tax increase would cripple economic recovery.

Love 'rekindled'

Under Bush and Reagan, Levin said, "this country lost its understanding of the importance of autos to the overall economy. Also, the Big Three weren't working toward the same objective."

Last week the chairs of General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, along with the United Auto Workers president, visited Clinton in Little Rock. Then John Smith, Harold Poling and Robert Eaton took the same message to the Economic Club of Detroit. Finally, they

met with the Michigan congressional delegation.

"The nation has to once again have a love affair with the American automobile, and I think that love affair is being rekindled," said Levin.

"General Motors said at the Economic Club, 'Look, there has to be a partnership on health care. We can't gain control of health care costs by ourselves.'"

"When I first came to Congress, the Big Three weren't operating at all in the same direction. They disagreed whether government had any role at all in the industry."

Big issues are 1) health costs and care, 2) Japan's closed market and 3) federal regulations.

"Health care costs add about \$600 to an American-made vehicle over a transplant or one made in Japan or Europe," Levin said.

"Red Poling (of Ford) was militant that this country must have trade policies that give our manufacturers an equal shot at markets. This one-way street in trade just isn't workable," said Levin, whose trade bill was threatened for veto by Bush.

"I've known Clinton for a number of years when he was with the Governors' Association, working on issues of health, training and retaining. He was an unusually creative governor — a mainstream person who wants change. He knows revolution doesn't work in

this country; reform does."

Dems gear up

Levin was the only federal, state or county office-holder to attend the Oakland County Democratic convention Saturday in Pontiac.

Local delegates elected state convention delegates and learned, to no one's surprise, that state chair Gary Corbin will seek a new two-year term.

The state convention will be Feb. 6 and 7 in Detroit's Cobo Center.

OU offers anti-smoking classes

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