

No way: House Dems share power only on paper

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Despite a 55 to 55 House deadlock, Republicans may be right when they say they're the winners in the "shared power" deal.

On paper, it looks like an even split. Republican Speaker Paul Hillelson and Democratic committee chairs rule in January, March and May. Democratic leader Curtis Hertel is speaker in February, April and June while Republicans hold committee chairs.

ANALYSIS

plishing our policy goals."

It's not a mere philosophical majority on policy matters that Republicans and conservative Democrats enjoy. It's the opportunity this year to bring pet measures to the floor without a procedural donnybrook.

The fine type in the "shared power" agreement spells out still

another advantage for Republicans. Republican leader Hillelson gets to refer "all Republican sponsored bills and joint resolutions to committee." Hillelson also gets to make the committee assignment for Senate-passed bills sponsored by Republican senators. Democratic leader Curtis Hertel has the same power over Democratic bills and resolutions.

In the past, Democratic Speak-

er Dodak, who was defeated for re-election, assigned all bills to committees. Certain committees became known as burial grounds for bills that Dodak or his predecessors — Gary Owen, Bobby Crim and Bill Ryan — didn't like.

Suppose a bill is locked up in committee because five Republicans support it and five Democrats are opposed, leaving no majority to report it out. Well, 12 times a year, a co-speaker may

cast an "extraordinary vote" to bring the bill to the full House floor.

In short, Republicans figure they benefit from bringing up more bills for floor votes.

Finally, both parties will have equal numbers of committee staff, caucus staff and personal staff.

Meanwhile on the Senate side, Republicans increased their majority by two when Gil DiNello of Macomb County switched his af-

firmation after the election.

That leaves Republicans with a 20-member majority over 16 Democrats. Two Senate seats are vacant with the election of Republican Nick Smith of Addison and Democrat James Barcia of Bay City to Congress.

Barring an unforeseen upset, both parties are expected to reclaim their respective Senate seats after special elections in mid-March.

But look beyond numbers and your high school civics lessons.

In the past, Democrats had not only a 60 to 60 majority; they used the power of committee chairs to bottle up legislation that the full House was likely to pass. Examples:

- House Judiciary Chair Perry Bullock, D-Ann Arbor, would sit on abortion restriction bills.
- House Judiciary subcommittee Chair Lyn Jondahl sat on bills to outlaw assisted suicide.
- Speaker Lew Dodak, D-Birch Run, used a fast gavel adjournment in the middle of a roll call to prevent an auto insurance reform bill from becoming law.
- Appropriations chair Dominic ("Godfather") Jacobetti, D-Negaunee, used both political and personal prejudices in parceling out pork programs and patronage. Now that Jacobetti's 18-year tenure is under fire over staff spending, even Democrats are admitting he was a problem.

Rules changed

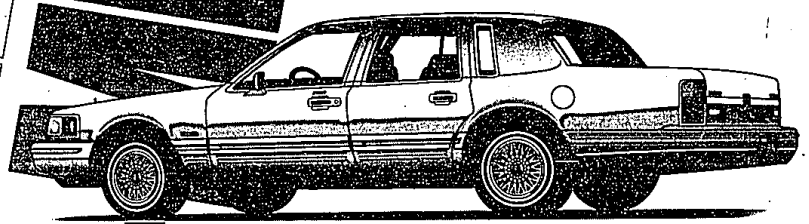
Veteran Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, understated the case when she said, "My Republican colleagues and I still believe we have a philosophical majority, and that will help produce an atmosphere geared toward accom-

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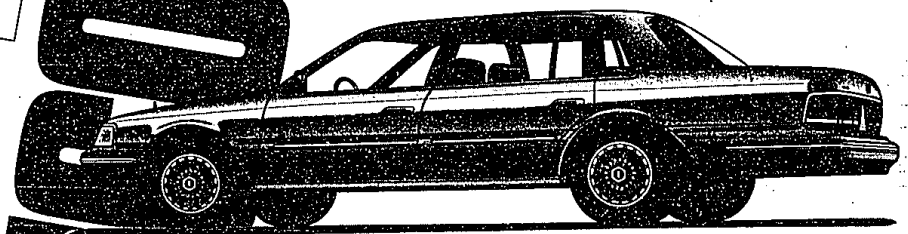
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