

Commerce department causes friction among Republicans

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

As he gets more enmeshed in government, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson is finding himself disagreeing with some of his Republican colleagues.

Patterson's most recent disagreement is with U.S. Rep. Dick Chrysler, R-Brighton, who is among the hard-charging faction of men calling for dismantling the federal Department of Commerce. As a matter of fact, Chrysler is chair of the Freshman Task Force to Eliminate the Department of Commerce.

"We're not feuding," Patterson emphasized Friday at the Oakland County International Trade Breakfast. "It's just a philosophical disagreement. I'm going to talk with him (Chrysler)."

Patterson said he agrees with Chrysler that federal government must be downsized and made more efficient and responsible. But the county executive said they differ on the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Patterson insists the department — at least as it helps Oakland businesses develop trade in Mexico — is helpful.

Chrysler, in contrast, wants commerce disbanded. "If ever there was a department that needed to be dismantled, it is the Department of Commerce," he wrote in a recent newspaper column.

The commerce department, in fact, was to station five trade experts in the International Trade Center, the executive wants to open in Pontiac, possibly this fall. As envisioned by Patterson, the trade center will have representatives from Oakland's Community and Economic Development Department, the Michigan International Trade Agency, the U.S. Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce under one roof to help county businesses develop foreign trade.

Dean Peterson, a spokesman for the department of commerce who spoke briefly at Friday's breakfast, is among those who is concerned U.S. investment abroad will be the loser if the department is dismantled. "We helped generate \$40 billion in foreign trade," he said.

Chrysler was not available last week. But his press secretary, Doug McGinn, Friday said Chrysler is aware of what part of the commerce department does to promote international trade.

"There's no basic difference between Mr. Chrysler and Mr. Patterson," said McGinn. That's why his boss is also calling for efficient parts of the commerce department — such as the department promoting international trade — to be incorporated in another federal department.

While any disagreement between Patterson and Chrysler may be minor, there appears to be a more serious difference of opinion between the county executive and State Sen. Mat Dunaskiss over SMART, the area transit system.

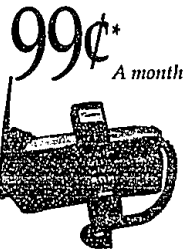
Dunaskiss, a Lake Orion Republican, is critical of SMART and insists the public would be better served if it was scrapped in favor of a new transit system that incorporates more privatization. Patterson acknowledges that

SMART needs to be more efficient and responsive. But the executive has been in the forefront of the effort to persuade Oakland voters to vote yes in the June election on raising property taxes to support SMART.

Patterson insists a functioning transit system is vital to the business interests of the county.



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