

Patterson's support of SMART sparks criticism

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

By supporting the recent SMART millage proposal, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson may have stuck his political neck out.

One hint was the musing of State Sen. Mat J. Dunaskas, R-Lake Orion, who said he may challenge Patterson in next year's Republican primary for Oakland County executive.

"The SMART thing (Patterson's endorsement) really bothered me," Dunaskas said Tuesday. "At a time the executive should have been leading in Oakland County to dismantle SMART, he was siding with Wayne County for a tax increase."

"Apparently that's bothered a lot of people, because more and more people are urging me to consider a run against Patterson," Dunaskas said he will introduce legislation this fall to do away with SMART (the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) so Oakland communities could establish their own system using state and federal subsidies.

While Patterson's support of the SMART millage was the last straw, Dunaskas said he is finding himself increasingly out of step with the executive. "At this point, I guess I'm just keeping options open. My wife and I will discuss the possibilities over the summer. Another option is a run against U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee."

Kildee, a Flint Democrat, is in the 9th District that includes Rochester Hills, Lake Orion and other north Oakland communities in which Dunaskas is strong.

Cathy M. Longo, GOP county chair, said it is normal and beneficial (for the party) for Dunaskas to evaluate his options, including a possible run against Patterson. "The Republican Party is open to new ideas and challenges," she said.

But a primary challenge to Patterson? A run against the Republican so frequently mentioned as a successor to Gov. John Engler?

Patterson openly chuckled at the thought of Dunaskas running against him. "It's the pressure of terms limits," the executive said Tuesday. "It makes usually normal people do goofy things."

Dunaskas can run for the senate only once more, in 1998 — something the executive said has colored his logic and wisdom. "Mat is a politician coming to the end of his career and he's looking for somewhere to land," said Patterson, mindful that

Dunaskas is an advocate of term limits who has leveled his share of criticism against career politicians.

While Dunaskas saw the executive's endorsement of SMART as a retreat from traditionally conservative policies, others saw that support as an indication of a maturing Patterson, someone willing to take a regional view of a problem.

Last Thursday at the Democratic caucus preceding the regu-

lar meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, for example, Democrats agreed that the SMART millage proposal would likely have been dead without the executive's support.

Commissioner Rust E. McPherson of Hazel Park went so far as to describe Patterson's support as "heroic," especially in light of heavy opposition from traditional Republican communities, including Waterford, the executive's home community.

For a moment, Democrats were silent, possibly disbelieving their own ears. "I never thought I'd hear that word from Democrat to describe Brooks Patterson," said a stunned Lawrence Pernick of Southfield.

One of Patterson's deputies, John L. Grubbs, seemed to be aware his boss had stuck his political neck out by backing SMART. "We're aware of SMART's problems," he said to the Democrats as he outlined his

vision of the transit system he and Patterson envision for Oakland.

Grubbs said there is no working model of the transit system they see SMART becoming, although the Minneapolis transit system has some of the neighborhood services Oakland voters are demanding.

"But we (Oakland officials) know we have to deliver on our promise to make SMART the best system available."

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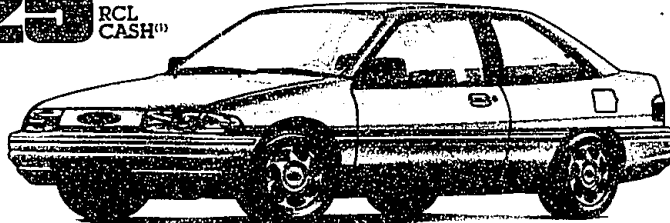
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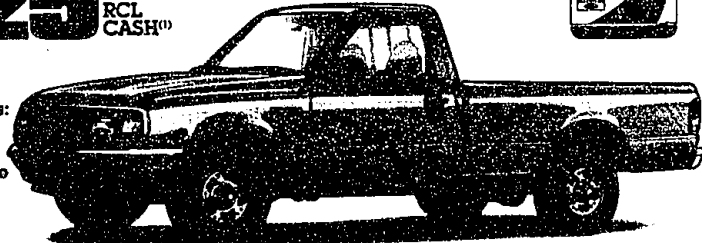
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