Here's what's driving gubernatorial contenders

News that former governor Jim Blanchard has launched the "Jim Blanchard for Governor Com-mittee" has jump-started the process that will eventually result in a Democratic candidate for governor in November 2002.



will be a very big deal for both par-ties. It will be the first with no sitfirst with no sit-ting governor on the ballot since 1982. Thanks to term limits and increased turnover in the Legislature, the relative powers of the governor's office have increased in increased in recent years – a process both abet-ted and encour-

aged by Gov. John Engler.

Here's a look at the three major possible contenders and what's driving them.

Since his embarrassing defeat by Engler in 1990, Blanchard has hardly been idle. A closs adviser to Bill Clinton in 1992, Blanchard was rewarded by an appointment as ambassador to Canada. By all reports, he did a good job. Blanchard returned to Washington to a law-and-lobbying practice with a well-connected firm. Ho kept his too in the Michigan politics, most recently as co-chairman of the successful effort to defeat the school voucher proposal.

A former congressman, Blanchard clearly would enjoy returning to Washington as a senator. Incumbent Sen. Carl Levin, however, looks like he has other ideas. Most observers figure hell run for a fifth term, making a Blanchard challenge in a primary seem, um, impolite.

So Blanchard, who remains vigorous and active, finds the governorship a likely target. He says ho's returning to Michigan "tested and improved by experience, but still with plenty of fire in my belly."

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While Blanchard was moving around the state, Michigan Rep. David Bonior - currently the No. 2 Democrat in the U. S. House and in line to be majority leader should the party win the House next year - discovered the 2000 census results will cost Michigan one congressional seat. Since Republicans will run the redistricting process - they control both the state Legislature and Surreme Court - they've got a terrific device for Supreme Court – they've got a terrific device for getting Bonior out of their hair: Redistrict him out of office.

So what's a very senior congressman whose district is at risk to do? Run for governor, of course, Bonior's biggest ally is UAW President Steve Yokich, also a Macomb County resident and a longtime friend. Notich could probably bring in plenty of support for Bonior from other segments of organized labor. Some Democrats, however, think a labor-backed Bonior candidacy would be deja vu of disaster all over again. After all, Howard Wolpe, picked by the UAW for governor in 1994, was a terrible candidate. Larry Owen's candidacy in 1998 (also created by the UAW) led directly to Geoffrey Freger. Moreover, Bonior is viewed as fuzzy by some important Democratic constituency groups on key

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issues such as choice on abortion and support for Israel.

Standing quictly in the wings is Jennifer Granholm, the Democrate' eminent blende and certainly the most popular figure in a party that has long struggled for a leader with brains and star power. Granholm's career is largely the product of Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Duggan, who together run probably the most competent Democratic machine around.

Elected Attorney General by a wide margin in 1998, Granholm faces an interesting set of political choices dictated in part by the fact that her time in office is limited to two four-year terms. If she chooses to run for AG again, she can expect a stiff challenge from Scott Romney, Engler's choice to run for AG but side-tracked to a seat on the MSU board. If she wins re-election as AG but still hankers for higher office after her term expires, a campaign for the governorship occupied by some-body else might be difficult.

One-on-one, I'd guess both Blanchard and Granholm would beat Bonior. With Blanchard and Bonior splitting the male vote, Granholm would likely clean up in a three-candidate mee, With

Granholm would beat Bonior. With Blanchard and Bonior splitting the malo voto, Granholm would likely clean up in a three-candidate race. With Democrats hoping for a candidate who can win In November and wouldn't be dominated by organized labor, it appears Blanchard and Granholm have an excellent basis for a long conversation about who does what and when.

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Poet laureate could polish this section of Rust Belt



Jeff Counts

same team. Turns out that were both Catholic Central ter isn't a bad ball

player.

Anyway, during a pause in the action McCotter and I started chatting. Just a general conversation about baseball, summer and eventually it turned, as it often does, to politics.

I shared one of my biggest complaints about Gov. John Engler, that he has no feeling for nature, the state of Michigan and the arts.

He's certainly no Bill Milliken, who fought oil drilling in one of the state seems – the Pigeon River country just north of Gaylord. Milliken of Traverse City always gave you the feeling that he cared about the land. I watched in the late 1970s when he appeared before an angry crowd of residents in northern Michigan near the town of Mio, where the state was planning to bury cows contaminated with the fire retardant PBB. Milliken took his knocks, but he knew the land and agriculture and tried to explain the state's actions as best as possible.

He was up for election at the time, and the Detroit area Democrat who was running against him showed up at the cattle burial site, trying to make political hay. The residents listened and walked away in disgust. The guy didn't know the difference between a bull and a cow.

Now that shee of unawareness is on the Republican foot.

But back to McCotter. He listened to my complaints about Engler and Republicans in general and then set out to do something. He introduced a bill to create a state poet. I had mentioned one of our state's best, Jim Harrison, who also penned the novella, "Legends of the Fall," which was turned into a block buster movie with Brad Pitt.

McCotter has always boen a big Bob Seger fan, and was pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'and and wand wand pushing for the old time Detroi

McCotter has always been a big Bob Seger fan, and was pushing for the old time Detroit rock 'n' roller. At first I thought the bill would go nowhere. But then it started moving through the state House and Senate, It got some attention. It

made me happy that our lovely state could have an official poet laureste. Michigan has spawned the careers of countless writers, including Ernest Hemingsway, who won a Nobel Prize for his 'Old Man and the Sea.'
Although I was hot for Harrison, an old friend of mine, I could have easily lived with Seger. Harrison said he was impressed by the poetry in Seger's songs.

The bill had some pretty good support and was approved by both Houses. I was excited. Maybe we could change our state's image a bit. The images of urban decay, racism and Rust Belt towns often represent our state on the national of evel.

level.
Claiming Seger, Harrison or another poet could do something to improve our image, to tell folks that we care about more than making cars, money and deer hunting. We could show folks we.

Claiming Bob Seger, Jim Harrison or another poet could do some thing to improve our image, to tell folks that we care about more than making cars, money and deer hunting. We could show folks we also care about the arts – that Michigan is more than real estate and factories:

also care about the arts – that Michigan is more than real estate and factories.

It was a great opportunity for Engler to rise above his crass view of where we live as simply real estate. And it was a perfect pitch coming from a fellow Republican, It was perfect for Republicans – it wouldn't cost anything.

In true form, Engler let the perfect pitch go past him. He refused to sign the bill – no, he didn't veto it – he just let is slide by. And he didn't even explain why.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Redford Observer. He can be reached at (734) 933-2114.

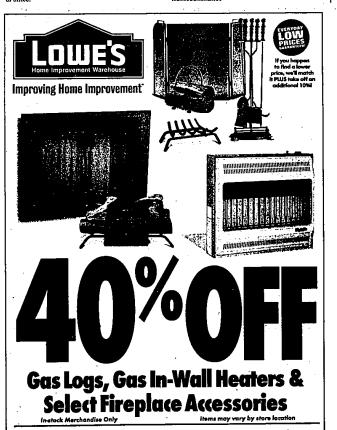
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