

COUNTY NEWS

Patterson speculates about Oakland County's Republican defections

BY PAT MURPHY
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Why did so many Oakland voters defect from the Republican Party last November?

State and county Republicans want answers to that question, according to county Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who held a press conference Tuesday to assess his first 100 days as the new GOP county chair.

Patterson has a theory about why voters in Oakland County — long considered a GOP bastion — supported Al Gore over George W. Bush in last fall's election.

He said the party locally had been taken over by the conservative wing that took "strident" positions on issues like abortion. Those positions did not mesh with mainstream Republicans, who then defected to Democrats,

said Patterson.

That defection was most notable at the top of the ticket — where voters rejected Bush and narrowly gave a majority of votes to incumbent Sen. Spencer Abraham. But voter dissatisfaction with the GOP was also evident in county races, said Patterson.

"I used to lead the (county) ticket with 68 percent of the vote," he said. "In November, I got 59 percent. I want to know what happened, and I want to know how to get those voters back."

To get those answers, state and county Republicans will be taking a poll within the next two months or so. The poll is significant, he said, because the answers could carry state-wide ramifications.

"The information gathered will

■ 'I used to lead the (county) ticket with 68 percent of the vote. In November, I got 59 percent.'**L. Brooks Patterson**
—Oakland County Executive

be specific for Oakland County," Patterson said, "but much of it can be extrapolated to much of Macomb County and western Wayne County."

Since taking the reins as county chair after the November election, Patterson said he has raised more than \$150,000 for the Oakland GOP, and general membership in the party has increased significantly.

The additional revenue has enabled the party to do things,

Patterson said, such as moving the headquarters from Birmingham to "larger and better" quarters in Royal Oak and hiring five staff workers.

While raising money is important, the big challenge for him as county chair has been — and continues to be — guiding the party away from the right toward the middle, said Patterson.

"If I've had one major accomplishment at all, it was to wrest control of the party from the religious right and put it in the middle," he said, "where the votes are."

"I don't think the Democrats win when Jesse Jackson carries the banner, and I don't think Republicans win when Jerry Falwell carries the banner. Elections are won in the middle."

Patterson identified Tom

McMillin, mayor of Auburn Hills and a member of the party's executive committee, as a leader in the party's adherence to the religious right.

Informed of Patterson's comments, McMillin said the new county chair was abandoning the family values traditionally championed by the GOP and creating tension within the party. "Raising money is fine," McMillin said, "but you don't give up your principles at the same time."

The conflict between Patterson and McMillin will intensify during a meeting of the party's executive committee on April 24. That's when the committee will vote on a resolution that would put the county GOP in opposition to an ordinance that will go before Royal Oak voters on May 15.

Among other things, the proposed ordinance would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Patterson — who has previously supported laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation at the state level — said the proposed Royal Oak ordinance is a local issue on which the county party should not take a position.

In a press release issued Tuesday, McMillin disagreed, insisting county Republicans should oppose the Royal Oak ordinance. "It is absurd to suggest county Republicans should not have a position on such an extreme issue as special rights based on homosexual behavior," said the release, which identified McMillin as the chair of the "Oakland County Conservatives."

Make your voice heard on roads, mass transit

BY MIKE MALOTT
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On a scale of one to 10, how would you rate southeast Michigan's current transportation system?

Asked that question a survey by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, residents of the region gave the system an average rating of 4.19.

Condition of road surfaces was main reason for that dissatisfaction, although Oakland and Livingston county residents picked the lack of an alternative to driving as the most serious problem.

As part of its 2025 Regional Transportation Plan, SEMCOG conducted a Regional Transit Opinion Survey earlier this year.

Some 1,404 residents of the region were questioned, but those interested in providing input still submit responses to the survey on the planning group's website at www.semco.org.

The survey will be used to help create a "regional transit vision" in the 2025 Transportation Plan this October. Responses will be taken through June 1, according to SEMCOG Executive Director Paul Tait.

Preliminary results show that support for additional funding for public transit is highest where residents are least satisfied with the current network.

Regular use of public transit is highest in Detroit, at 6.9 percent. But overall for the region,

just 2.5 percent reported regular use of public transit. Forty-two percent said they were "very likely" to use public transit if it was "clean, safe and inexpensive." Twenty-three percent said they were unlikely to ever use public transit.

Potential riders rated safety, 32 percent; reliability, 23 percent; convenience, 23 percent; and routes, 21 percent, as the most important factors in deciding whether to use public transit.

Residents said they would be most interested in using public transit to go to the airport, 48 percent; to go shopping or eat out, 47 percent; to attend a special event, 37 percent; or to go to work, 34 percent.

Asked if they would support a tax increase for public transit, residents placed their likelihood of supporting a tax on average at 5.77 on that 1-10 scale. Detroit and Wayne County showed the highest support for a tax increase.

Forty-seven percent of respondents said they would prefer transit be supported through a sales tax, 22 percent said they would prefer a property tax, and 26 percent said they were unlikely to support a tax at all.

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