

# Congressional candidates trade shots as campaign intensifies

Joe Knollenberg and David Fink taking aim at one another

BY DAN WEST  
STAFF WRITER

If the opening weeks of their one-on-one campaign are an indication, the congressional race between Joe Knollenberg and David Fink will revolve around senior issues.

In press releases and at public events in recent days, both candidates criticized the other's policies regarding Social Security reform, Medicare, prescription drug coverage and taxes. Knollenberg, the incumbent Republican from Bloomfield Township, slammed U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey (D-New

York), a ranking House Democrat who was in town Wednesday stumping for Fink. The Knollenberg campaign took the opportunity to knock some of her "anti-senior" votes and link them to Fink.

Fink, the Democratic challenger from West Bloomfield, denounced Knollenberg's recent taxpayer-funded mailing distributed to constituents that declared he's against privatization of Social Security. Fink said Knollenberg's voting record and past statements contradicted the mailing's message. Fink was flanked by U.S. Sen. Carl Levin (D-Detroit) at a Farmington Hills gathering Tuesday. Both swiped at Knollenberg's past actions that, they said, reflects a desire to privatize Social Security, which would leave these tax withholdings at the whim of an unstable

## 9TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Communities in the new 9th Congressional District include: Auburn Hills, Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Franklin, Keego Harbor, Lake Orion, Oakland Township, Orchard Lake, Orion Township (part), Rochester, Rochester Hills, Troy, Waterford and West Bloomfield.

stock market and other investment methods.

"We can't afford to take money out of the system and put it into the stock market," Fink said. "We shouldn't gamble with that safety net."

As individuals report more losses to their retirement accounts, Fink reminded the audience Knollenberg spoke in favor of stock market investments in past re-election campaigns. Referencing a number

of Knollenberg's votes in recent years, Fink contends the congressman supported measures that took money out of the Social Security Trust Fund to pay down the national debt, fund tax cuts and other government programs.

"That took away from a projected \$6 trillion surplus for the Social Security Trust Fund at the beginning of 2001," Fink said. "This would have protected the system and its beneficiaries longer."

"He's opposed to use of the word privatization, but his record shows otherwise."

Fink's comments angered Knollenberg campaign chairman Paul Welday, who said the challenger is twisting facts to scare seniors.

"If this is what he's going to do, then he has an obligation to tell people what are his ideas for long-term solvency of Social Security," Welday said.

The way Social Security is currently funded, income taxes collected from today's workers fund benefits for today's senior citizens. Over the next 20 years, as the baby-boomer generation retires, analysts said if the system doesn't change, it could run out of money because income taxes won't cover benefits as the demand increases.

Knollenberg, Welday said, is

responsibly researching "all options" to address the Social Security dilemma. Welday said the congressman never voted to privatize the system, but found merit to some programs that give people the option to invest some of their Social Security taxes in equity accounts, bonds or fixed income funds.

Joe Knollenberg would never require people to invest their Social Security withholdings," Welday said. "I would ask David Fink and Carl Levin to stop attacking us and explain how they're going to solve the problem."

Fink had no specifics, but said he believes there's a bipartisan solution. "Right now," Fink said, "all we're hearing is a lot of partisan rhetoric and a lot of disingenuous claims about privatization."

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## SMART

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Bus routes include stops at Schoolcraft College and Madonna University in Livonia and the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College, and along Grand River in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Routes also go to such places as Westland Shopping Center and to park-and-ride lots at Westland City Hall or Ford Field in Livonia.

"Now we must aggressively try to get more riders," said Dan Dirks, general manager of SMART. "We have geared our service to entry level workers. We noticed in February (2001) that as the economy changed,

we hurt ... that's when we really noticed."

"Getting workers to where the jobs are - that's our No. 1 mission," Dirks said. Ridership has picked up in the Farmington area especially, Dirks said. Many jobs - as many as seven out of 10 - are more than 10 miles away from the central part of Detroit. "We have one of the most dispersed job markets in the world," he said.

fares, something SMART badly needs, Dirks admits.

Of the \$90 million annual budget, 36 percent comes from the state. The millage should generate most of the balance - about \$40 million. Fares bring in the rest.

Dirks hopes to buy the new easy-to-board Gillig transit buses during the next three years; admittedly, some of the current buses are in bad shape. Gillig, based in California, started out as a carriage and buggy maker in 1890 and now is one of the leading builders of the "low floor" buses.

The millage vote did especially well in affluent Oakland County, in part because of support from L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland county executive.

Winning margin percentages were 66-33 in Oakland, 55-45 in Wayne and 57-43 in Macomb.

Patterson and Ed McNamara (outgoing Wayne County executive) helped us a lot," Dirks said.

The second biggest customer base for SMART is the elderly and the disabled, Dirks said. "We have one of the highest percentages of small buses and

vans of any mass transit system." Dirks does not fear the future and discussions in southeast Michigan and in the state legislature about regional transportation and such agencies as Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DART).

"We will complement any service expansion in the area. We are the 'background service.' No matter what they do (regionally), all municipal systems must have a bus feeder system." SMART ridership is about 200,000 passengers per week.

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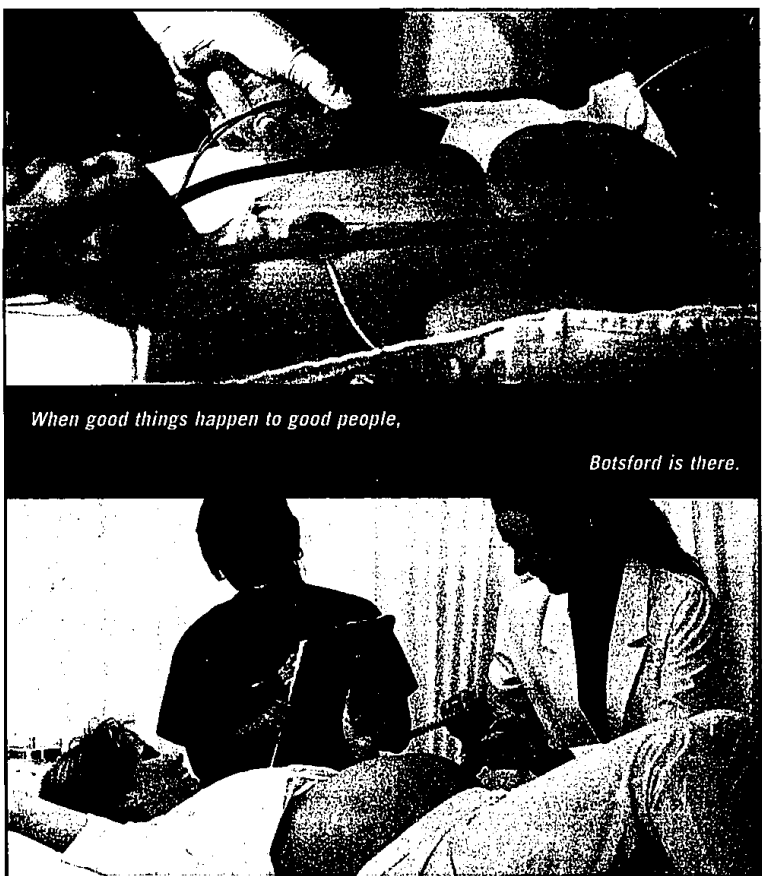
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