

# Dems may walk out of board meeting

By ROBERT KIPPER

**Democrats see the new rules as an attempt to muffle the minority.**

OAKLAND COUNTY—The threat of a Democratic walkout or some other form of protest hangs over Thursday's meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners if the majority Republican caucus pushes through its new set of operating rules for the board.

The package of rules—which, among other changes, places new limits on the length of debate—have been branded as an attempt by the Republicans to exercise firm control over board actions.

After two committee meetings and at least one private session designed to iron out differences, Republicans and Democrats are primed for a fight on a number of the new rules.

**BERNARD LENNON**, Democratic caucus chairman, will meet with other Democratic commissioners prior to Thursday's board meeting to determine what, if anything, they will do to protest the new rules.

Lennon said a walkout would be considered or the Democrats might

choose simply to ignore the new rules, he said.

The Democrats aren't in a position to do much more than protest since the Republicans, who hold a majority on the board, have enough votes to pass the rules. It is largely the majority party's function after each election to draft new operating rules.

**DEFENDING THE** new rules, Republican board chairman Fred Houghten (R-6), of Rochester, and Republican caucus leader Lillian Moffitt (R-15), of Bloomfield Township, said during a committee meeting this week the new guidelines would enable commissioners to operate in a more orderly fashion.

However, Democrats see the new rules as an attempt, in Commissioner Lennon's words, to "muffle the minority."

Democrats are most angered by proposed rules that limit the time of floor discussion to 10 minutes per commissioner and the rule that allows debate to be cut-off by a vote of 14 commissioners—exactly half the board.

The cut-off rule favors Republicans since they hold 15 seats on the new board.

In previous years a two-thirds vote of all commissioners present was required to end debate. On a crucial issue, when commissioner attendance was high as many as 18 votes were needed.

**THE DEMOCRATS** were successful in modifying the cut-off rule during a sometimes heated meeting of the general government committee Monday. The committee, which has now discussed the rules twice, will report to the full board Thursday.

According to this change, debate cannot be cut-off until every commissioner has had at least one chance to speak.

Despite that modification and several other changes, Democratic committee members were far from mollified after Monday's session.

"You've cut off debate and limited us on how long we can speak," Lennon said. "What sense do we (the Democrats) have in coming up here?"

Glaring at Houghten, the new board chairman, across the committee table, Lennon added:

"You gave a nice speech last week about cohesiveness and the new board working together. But, by adopting these rules you have driven a wedge between the two political parties."

"If you expect togetherness now, forget it."

**HOUGHTEN**, with a little help from Commissioner Moffitt, denied that the Republicans were assuming too much control.

"I don't think we're trying to muffle anybody," Houghten said. Mrs. Moffitt, while admitting that some rules took away "a personal touch," added:

"I'd like to try this new approach, a more business-like approach." Commissioner Niles Olson (D-3), of Pontiac, blasted the rules as "too-

businesslike, too cold and too cut off from the people."

**AMONG OTHER** things, the new rules advise commissioners to attend meetings, stay in their seats and not to talk during voting and refrain from discussing personalities when they speak on the floor.

Some commissioners have taken exception to the tone of the rules which they say are designed for children.

Democrats flared-up Monday over rules that require commissioners to get permission from their committee chairman before they are permitted

to leave a meeting and one that calls for commissioners to be marked absent if they are tardy for meetings.

"This is the most puerile rule I have ever seen," said Commissioner Alexander Perinoff (D-21), of Southfield. "What infantile mind thought this up?" asked Commissioner Olson.

However, Republicans held firm for the rule, saying that commissioners' absences in the past make such a stipulation necessary.

"It's a good rule, we need some accountability," said Commissioner Wallace Gabler (R-12), of Royal Oak.

## Youth corps sets projects

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Further information may be obtained from Instructional Specialist Program, Michigan Department of Education, P.O. Box 420, Lansing, 48902.

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