



## Rep. Brotherton looks at first six months in office

For a freshman state legislator in his first six months in office, it can often be a combination of frustration and stimulation. Rep. Wilbur ("Sandy") Brotherton has found both in Lansing.

He represents western Southfield, Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Rep. Brotherton reflects on those six months in the following extensive interview with the Observer & Eccentric. He was questioned by staff members Nick Sharkey and Carl Stoddard. His responses were transcribed by Mrs. Helen Cey.

**O&E:** You said last October during your campaign "We need to do something about the property tax." What have you done?

**BROTHERTON:** Well, I have introduced some legislation that is currently being considered by one of the committees, which would provide a spread for use by the assessing officers in the various local units of government to establish assessments on property. This is pretty complicated, but the point is there has been a conflict for a number of years between what legislation has said and what the constitution says. As a result, many have felt that we are assessing at over 50 per cent of some property in violation of the state constitution. This particular bill would attempt to correct that. However, there isn't a lot of sympathy for that. So one of the representatives came up with a bill which passed the House immediately, and which I supported.

That bill would require the assessing of property by class. What this says is each class of property will be assessed separately and will be equalized separately. That in itself will help to balance some inequities.

The other thing that we have worked on, without a great deal of success, is to get this whole question of property tax looked at again. There are probably 50 bills that have been introduced, one version or another, to try to do something about the property tax. But it's a very complex issue, and I think the bill that we have introduced is probably going to do some good.

There is another bill that's going to be introduced and has gone to the House which will adjust the property tax assessed valuation level downward in steps.

In other words, it's at 50 per cent now, it will go to 49 per cent next year, and to 48 per cent the following year. By 1978, I believe, it goes to 46 per cent. So it's a gradual thing. This is another attempt to deal with that particular problem.

**O&E:** People sometimes wonder about the extent of the powers of a state legislator. As an example: If you called the State Highway Department and said, "Eight Mile Road needs repairs," would those repairs be done?

**BROTHERTON:** I think so. It depends on the nature and extent of the repairs. It depends on how you approach it. If you approach it in a way that irritates and causes resentment in the Highway Department, then you may end up getting absolutely nothing. Most of those people are civil service employees, and they're well protected by state law.

They don't have to take any abuse from anyone regardless of whether you're a member of the State Legislature.

I got involved in a problem in repaving Grand River in Farmington, which had been scheduled for several years and got hung up through a series of cutbacks and other changes of policy. Shortly after I got to Lan-

sing, I was able to get the thing put on the front burner, set up meetings among Farmington Hills and Farmington and the road commission. They're in the process of getting the road ready to turn it back to the city for their maintenance. Through the efforts of the city managers of the two cities, the thing has worked out to the point that it is now ready for resurfacing this year. In that respect we were able to help a little bit.

**O&E:** The bill approving limited teacher strikes was approved by the House and is now in the Senate. How did you vote on this bill and why?

**BROTHERTON:** I voted "no" for two reasons. First, I objected to the three weeks that they give teachers the right to strike without any financial penalty. I didn't think it was necessary from the discussions I had with teachers' groups.

Most of them felt that a right to strike was what they were after. As I told some of the teachers, if you want to alienate the people that support your operations and pay the taxes for your salaries, then go out and get by power anything you can get. That's exactly what's going to happen.

**O&E:** You were critical of the Common Cause proposal for campaign reform. What were your objections?

**BROTHERTON:** I am concerned about local officials being called on to divulge his financial assets and source of income and the effect that would have on attracting the right kind of people into the things that I think are probably most vital: the school board, planning commission, boards of appeal, and city councils.

Most of those are non-paying or very low-paying jobs. For you to reveal your sources of income and property holdings, it's just more than some people want to do.

There is concern that some people wouldn't want to serve because they felt they were not well off enough. I think this is likely to be true, not at the outset, but maybe a year or two from now once the assets and the income, and sources of income of the other members of councils are well established. Someone who's a plumber or an electrician is asked to serve on one of these bodies and he says, "Hey, wait a minute, everybody on there is entrepreneur or a big shot somewhere, and how am I going to fit in?"

**O&E:** We understand you have a nearly perfect attendance record. How did you vote on the malpractice bill?

**BROTHERTON:** I voted for all those bills. The only controversy I could see was that some people thought they were going too far in terms of leaning toward the physicians.



"The one group that is neglected is the middle income, the average kind of guy."  
--State Rep. Wilbur Brotherton

Staff photos by Harry G. Mauthe

I felt myself they didn't go far enough. For example, one bill permitted the patient to indicate at the beginning of treatment that he would accept arbitration, but then they could change their mind later. I said, "Why did you do that?" It would seem to me that once they said they would go for arbitration they should be obliged to stay with it."

**O&E:** It has been said "Most freshman legislators don't make a lot of noise." Would you agree?

**BROTHERTON:** Yes, I think that's true. What we've been told, and I think rightfully so, is to take a little time to find out what's going on. Then find a field in which you can become expert enough to begin to contribute something.

Frankly, I find that there are many legislators who are not freshmen, who have been around there for many years and they don't make a lot of noise either.

**O&E:** What is the job of a legislator, as you see it?

**BROTHERTON:** Well, I see first a person representing his own constituency and making certain the problems they are having with the state are dealt with by somebody on the spot. Secondly, a legislator must play a role in helping to make the laws and set the budget for the State of Michigan.

**O&E:** What major bills have you introduced since you've been in Lansing?

**BROTHERTON:** I've introduced one major bill. It's a bill that would require circuit court judges to accept the budget and the classifications of salary levels set by the county board of commissioners. This is a bill that is designed to deal with a problem that came up earlier this year in Livingston County where the courts set their own budget, and then told the county commissioners they would have to put the money up.

It went to the Court of Appeals and the Court of Appeals upheld them. So this is a bill that will try to separate the rights of the legislative and the rights of the judicial branch of government.

I introduced two other bills which were designed to help public health officials, nurses and public health officers, sanitarians and the director of public health. It was more or less in the malpractice insurance end of it.

**O&E:** Do you plan to seek re-election next year?

**BROTHERTON:** I think so. Right at the moment I am expecting to do that. I haven't made up my mind entirely because I can't tell what's going to happen. Unless I become completely disillusioned, I will be seeking the election.

**O&E:** Do you have aspirations for higher office?

**BROTHERTON:** No, not right now. I feel that I have enough to do to really make this job work the way it should.

**O&E:** How often do you get out

Continued on Page 4A



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