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# Murphy: speaker for 1 million people

First in a series  
By TIM RICHARD

Daniel T. Murphy's life is like a three-ring circus. Ring one is his office in the Oakland County Service Center in Pontiac, where, as the first elected county executive in Michigan, he administers a \$80-million budget and a host of services, often in the face of lawsuits and legal maddles. Late one afternoon last week, he was bound for Washington to testify before a congressional subcommittee on aviation. Ring two is that he is a political spokesman for a million people, making him second only to the mayor of Detroit as a local leader in Michigan.

And he concluded a lengthy interview on his pioneering job with Ring three, his philosophy. "I'm a home rule advocate. That is the answer for government—a charter that will permit the people in the county to determine their own destiny, permit the county broader powers. The handwringing on the wall, we've got to solve any problems and means to cooperate right here, stop being so parochial. If we don't, the legislature may try to solve our problems with some kind of area wide government and we're going to lose our voice because when he gets excited."

COUNTY GOVERNMENT in Michigan has traditionally been a Hydra-headed proliferation of offices, bureau departments. But a year ago, acting under the new Public Act 138, Oakland voters picked Republican Murphy as county executive and gave him administration what he considers a clear mandate—a unified government that would be more manageable, possess greater stability and be more responsive and accountable.

Political friends and foes tend to be satisfied on that point a year later. The concept was good, I am still convinced, said Lawrence Pernick, a Democratic county commissioner from Southfield who had favored the executive plan. "With an elected executive you have someone accountable to the people period really. I originally supported a county manager, appointed by the board like a city manager," said Julian Moffitt, a Republican commissioner from Bloomfield Township. "But the people have made a decision. There's greater accountability today. Dan Murphy has consolidated 34 divisions into six and helped to pinpoint responsibility," he added.

MURPHY CREDITS the 36-member board of commissioners who "reconstituted themselves to transforming the board from its traditional role of administrative policy making to a body restricted solely to policy making."

That was the intent of Act 138, which allows counties to elect an executive or appoint a manager, although it doesn't eliminate such elective posts as prosecutor, sheriff, clerk and treasurer.

It's deficient, Murphy says of Act 138. When people think of county government, they think of anything with Oakland County in front of it—parks, mental health, roads. "I don't have any control over those."

He predicts it will take several years for the legislature and courts to clear up the ambiguities and draw clear lines between administration and policy making and change the administration.

FRANKLY, MURPHY is after more centralizing of authority and accountability which is the other side of the coin. It's not because I, Dan Murphy, want to hold the power, because I'm not gonna be around that long. Nor does he aspire to be governor, despite the credentials and power base an Oakland County executive could bring to such a race. Currently there's a lawsuit—Commonwealth Robert Page II Birmingham calls

**Service agency plans hearings**  
A series of 9 public hearings to determine what direction the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency is going to take in education, employment, health, senior citizens and community development have been planned in Oakland County for the first week of March. The community will be able to express its needs in these areas and others not now addressed by the human service agency. The specific locations have not yet been determined.

It "friendly"—to clear up what happens to the public works department, whose board was eliminated by Act 138. Pernick explained that Murphy vetoed the county board's action in setting up a public works director. "That left us in the middle of confusion. The net effect is to stop issuance of bonds under the sewer and water account," Pernick said. What courts and politics must resolve is whether a public works chief should report to the executive. If he is elected by the board of commissioners or if he is directly elected by the voters.

MEANWHILE, COMMISSIONERS are pondering whether to consolidate the public works department and the drain commissioner's office. Drain Commissioner George Kuhn, who campaigned for the job three years ago by vowing to eliminate it, says consolidation will save the county \$200,000. In the middle of it all, Murphy began what may be his biggest political battle to date in his state of the county address. He sent out shock waves when he proposed that the newly autonomous county road commission be abolished and its functions brought under the executive.

Throughout Michigan road commissions have three members appointed by the county boards. Road commissions get their money from state taxes and, for practical purposes, report to no one. They also have a lot of political clout.

"LAST YEAR," Murphy recalled, Bill Huffman in the Senate wrote a bill to do away with the road commission and the parks commission. It got amended to where I couldn't recognize it. Murphy will ask friendly legislators to

write a law granting counties to abolish the road commission. "If the legislature can't stand up, then they should pass a bill to let counties operate under Act 138 have a referendum," he insists. If the road commission were abolished its chief would report to the director of planning and physical development under the county executive.

HIS ULTIMATE plan is to consolidate all three functions—drains, public works and roads—under one roof. Murphy figures he can cut \$500,000 out of

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The road commission's administrative rods by consolidating its finance department, purchasing, public information and computer functions under the general administration's roof. And there would be more efficient use of trucks, equipment and manpower back and forth, he said.

Next: The cabinet speakers

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