

analysis

# A 'Quadrant' leads Lansing behind scenes

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

The most powerful group in state government isn't mentioned in the Michigan Constitution. It's not written into any law, it wasn't created by executive order, and it's not in any citizens guide to government.

It defies the rule of civics which splits government into separate branches. It's referred to as "the leadership" or the "governor and the Quadrant."

ITS RECENT successes have made major news. In December, the governor and the Quadrant broke a 6-year-old logjam by working out compromise solutions to thorny workers compensation and unemployment compensation reforms.

Two weeks ago, it halted a decade of wrangling over tax reform by agreeing to a ballot proposal and, in three days, getting two-thirds of the legislators to place it on a special May 19 ballot.

In 1976 it reorganized the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

"It makes sense to have the elected leadership try to reach a consensus," said state Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville.

Not everyone is happy with the existence and workings of the group. Its bypassing of standard operating procedure offends some lawmakers.

But everyone agrees the group has clout. Its members:

William Faust, Democrat of Westland, state Senate majority leader. Faust, who will be 51 Sunday, is a former newsmen and township official.

Robert VanderLaan, Republican of Kentwood, Senate minority leader. VanderLaan, 58, was previously a high school teacher, part-time college instructor and township official.

Bobby D. Crim, Democrat of Davison, speaker of the House of Representatives. Crim, 49, is a former teacher and school administrator.

William R. Bryant Jr., Republican of Grosse Pointe Farms, House minority leader. Bryant, 42, is an attorney and former Wayne County commissioner.

William G. Milliken, Republican of Traverse City, in his 13th year as governor. A former community college trustee, "Young Turk" state senator and lieutenant governor. Milliken, who is 59 today, has been chief executive longer than anyone in Michigan history.

THE QUADRANT was born about 1972, Faust recalled.

Since that time, it has become almost an operating necessity because the Republican governor found himself dealing with a Democratic majority in the House (The House has had a Democratic majority since 1983).

Why is the governor-Quadrant so potent? According to Sen. Doug Ross, D-Oak Park, a former Michigan Citizens Lobby leader: "It has the ability to start a proposal which has the power to force people to deal with it. (In the Senate) we all have our own proposals. There are maybe 20 proposals dealing with the property tax."

In effect, the governor-Quadrant team sorts through the existing ideas and synthesizes a compromise with enough big-name support to get everyone's attention.

Ross finds the situation in Lansing one of growing openness (Open Meetings and Freedom of Information acts were passed in the 1970s) and public interest in the machinations of government.

The governor-Quadrant, however, operates as a closed group, insulated from interest groups and able to deal with partisan splits, Ross said. Members can pound the table and cuss freely.

FAUST DENIES that other lawmakers are cut out of decision-making.

"The decision-making is in the hands of the representatives," Faust said last week, only minutes after the Senate approved placing the tax plan on the ballot.

"Proposals made in the Quadrant should reflect the thinking of the caucus," he said, referring to the two parties' caucuses in the two houses of the legislature.

"We agreed that we would take (Quadrant) proposals back to our caucuses if we had trouble," Faust added.

State Rep. Roy Smith, R-Saline, an acknowledged tax expert, objected that the Quadrant doesn't necessarily have tax experts on it when it's discussing taxes.

Faust replied, "In Quadrant meetings, technical experts on taxes were available from the House and Senate staffs and sat in. The governor had (Budget director Gerald) Miller and his legal adviser in."

"A LEADER has to know the consensus of his group. Otherwise he wouldn't be a leader very long," Faust added.

While the speaker of the House serves for a two-year term, he said, the situation is different in the Senate, where the leader serves at the pleasure of his party members. Faust got his leadership job in 1977, when Democrats became dissatisfied with the Majority Leader William Fitzgerald and dumped him.

Another lawmaker pointed out that the workers compensation debate, after six years, had degenerated to a name-calling contest between the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, which had one proposal, and Sen. David Plawewski, D-DeARBorn Heights, who had a union-backed plan.

Governor and Quadrant broke the logjam to resolve a problem which economists said was doing serious damage to Michigan's reputation in business circles.

The flap over the Allen amendment, designed by the Senate to drop city income taxes from the formula, illustrates how upset lawmakers could get over a \$10 million drop in a \$300 million bucket. Both houses had to approve the entire proposal a second time.

The existence of the governor-Quadrant committee shows again that government often operates along informal lines, not along the organizational chart shown in Billy's and Bobby's civics textbook.

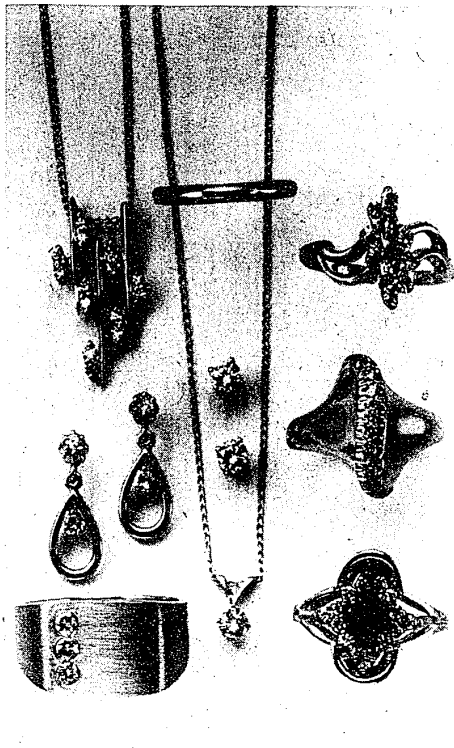
And it demonstrates what journalist-historian Alastair Cooke calls the "three rules of American politics: Compromise, compromise, compromise."

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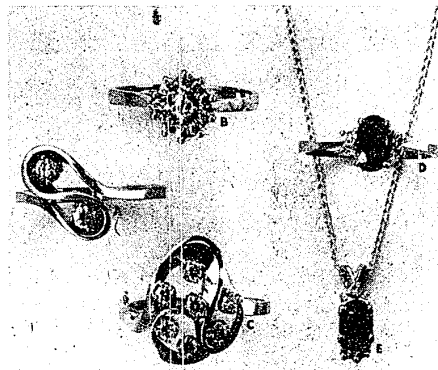
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Photos enlarged to show detail

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Sunday, March 29	11-5										
Monday, March 30		4-9	11-8	11-8	11-8	11-8					
Tuesday, March 31		11-8	4-9	11-8		11-8					11-8
Wednesday, April 1		11-8	11-8		11-8	4-9	11-8			4-9	
Thursday, April 2		11-8					11-8	11-8	11-8		11-8
Friday, April 3			11-8			11-8				11-8	
Saturday/April 4		11-5	11-8			11-8					
Sunday, April 5									12-5		
Monday, April 6		11-8		4-9			11-8		11-8	4-9	
Tuesday, April 7					4-9	11-8	11-8		11-8	11-8	
Wednesday, April 8				11-8	11-8		4-9		11-8		11-8
Thursday, April 9			11-8			11-8					4-9
Friday, April 10				11-8							11-8
Saturday, April 11					11-8	11-8					11-8

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