

Blanchard quietly builds coalition

By Tim Richard
and Sue Roelak
staff writers

All three major union powers in the Democratic Party have endorsed him for governor. And yet U.S. Rep. James Blanchard is rarely heard by the luncheon clubs or seen at the plant gates.

"I'm spending most of my time outstate and fund-raising," said Blanchard, 39, a four-term congressman from Pleasant Ridge who is seeking to be the first Democrat in the state executive office in 20 years.

"And I'm in Washington part of the week," said Blanchard, who chairs a House economic stabilization subcommittee.

When the Redford Democratic Boosters Club entertained gubernatorial candidates one Tuesday evening, Blanchard sent field chairman Rick Weiner, a political pro. But the candidate himself was on hand for a private home and restaurant reception



James Blanchard building a coalition

among prominent Livonia Democrats later in the week.

HIS LACK of local visibility has made him a target for other gubernatorial hopefuls.

Conservative Republican Richard Headlee, running a business-oriented campaign, charged Blanchard and his UAW connection are part of the Michigan's economic problem, not part of the cure.

Blanchard took it in stride. He said in an interview:

"First, a cross-section of Michigan is going to endorse me, and a cross-section of Michigan is going to have to solve Michigan's problem."

"Second, because of my handling of Chrysler, I fully endorse, and I believed I deserved, the UAW endorsement."

"Third, I've been able to raise half the legal limit of campaign contributions from individuals — like here," he said, gesturing at the roomful of people.

BLANCHARD gained national attention and the admiration of prominent Michigan Democrats with his handling of "Chrysler" — political shorthand for the complex package of federal, state, Canadian provincial and private loan guarantees to shore up North America's No. 3 auto maker.

His campaign literature emphasizes the Chrysler effort — that and the general theme of jobs.

"When jobs are literally one, two and three on the agenda," Weiner told the Redford Boosters, "Jim is the only candidate tested on a tough economic question."

"Jim is the only candidate with a Washington and a Lansing perspective."

"He is the only candidate who can get business and labor to work cooperatively . . . seeking a consensus to get Michigan's economic recovery started."

"He is the only candidate who can put together a coalition."

"WE CAN'T expect any magic bailout from Washington," Weiner went on. "Reagan is dismantling 40 years of federal programs."

"There will be recovery of the auto industry, but not like in the heyday."

"We'll have to use the state's bonding power to encourage different businesses to settle in Michigan."

"His endorsements (by the UAW, AFL-CIO and Michigan Education Association) tend to serve as a catalyst for even greater support," Weiner said in answer to a question on whether Blanchard needs individual help. "Those were well-worked endorsements. The reasons were hammered home: His work on economic stabilization and on Chrysler."

SEEKING the statehouse job, Blanchard is aware he's walking from one trouble spot to another.

"The state has been running a cash flow deficit since 1975. The cigarette tax (increase) is earmarked to help reduce that," he said. "By its very nature, it's an admission they have not been running a balanced budget."

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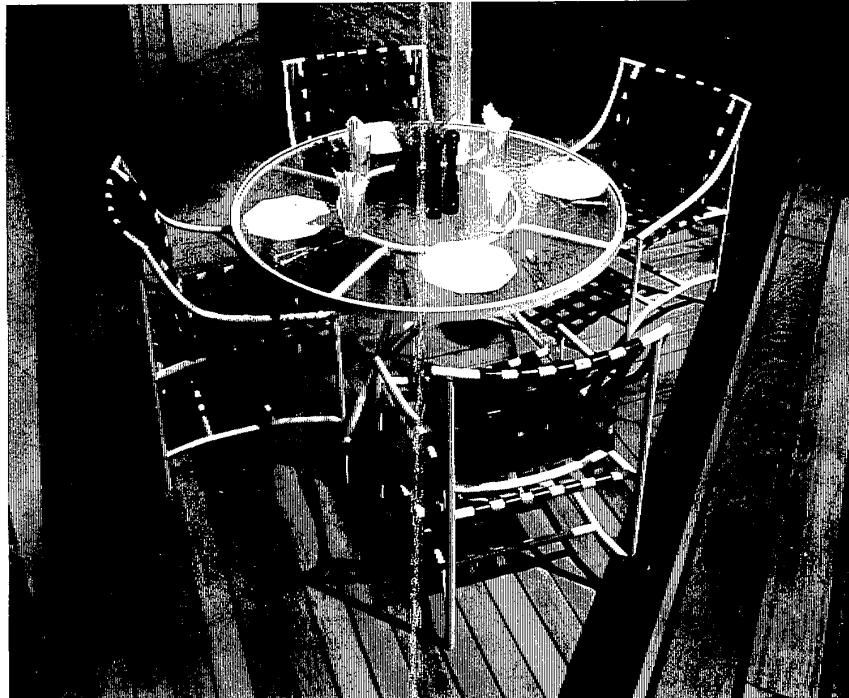
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