Dem gubernatorial contenders taking shots at Blanchard

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Two Democratic candidates for governor couldn't refrain from taking potshots at frontrunner Rep. James Blanchard at a debate recently before a group of Michigan Bell Telephone Co. managers.

State Sen. Kerry Kammer, D-Pontiac, labeled as "absurd" Blanchard's claim to be the only candidate tested by tough economic issues (the Chrsyler guaranteed loans).

Kammer also pounced on the congressman from Pleasant Ridge for what he called Blanchard's unavailability to debate at public forums.

FORMER STATE Sen. William Fitzgerald of Detroit accused Blanchard of opposing workers' and unemployment compensation reforms and property tax relief.

Fitzgerald, the 1978 gubernatorial nominee, also said Blanchard dodged important campaign issues.

"If the issues weren't difficult, Jim wouldn't avoid them," Fitzgerald said.

After the meeting, Blanchard denied Fitzgerald's accusations and said Fitzgerald intentionally misrepresented his positions.

"There's not going to be any federal rescue for Michigan," Blanchard told the group. "We must have our own strategy. I'd like to repeal the single business tax and straighten out Michigan's finances."

ALL GUBERNATORIAL candidates showed up except two Republicans — Lt. Gov. James Brickley and insurance executive Richard Headlee.

A major question from the Bell audience was the statePublic Service Commission, which regulates utility rates.

Blanchard, state Sens. Ed Pierce, D-Ann Arbor, Kammer and Fitzgerald said they favored the governor retaining his appointment power of the PSC and keeping politics out of rate regulation.

Republican State Sen. John Welborn of Kalamazoo also favored gubernatorial appointments.

"The regulatory climate in Michigan is very bad. I would appoint people who know the problems of workers and understand how the free enterprise system works," said Welborn.

Zolton Ferency, Ingham County commissioner from the Democrats' "socialist bloc," favored election of commissioners, as did attorney John Safran.

State Sen. David Plawecki, D-Dearborn Heights, said he'd like to see the commission's philosophy changed but didn't elaborate.

LIBERATARIAN DICK Jacobs said that if he is elected he will "abolish the PSC because it violates individuals' rights."

Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, a Republican, didn't address the PSC question, nor did Independent Bob Tisch.

Tisch asked for support of the Tisch III, the property tax cut proposal he hopes to have on the November ballot.

All candiates agreed, not surprisingly, that joblessness is the No. 1 issue in Michigan.