

Gradually, county boards take on a one-party hue

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

It was politics as usual when the Oakland County Board of Commissioners met for the first time in 1982.

The order of the day was to approve appointments to various boards and commissions — a routine matter.

But Democrats' tempers flared when the Republican-controlled board failed to reappoint Commissioner Anne M. Hobart, R-Waterford Township, and Nancy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, to the panel.

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analysis

foot," Doyon told the board, calling it "an untenable abuse of power."

TO THE DISMAY of Doyon and his Democratic colleagues, the board appointed Commissioners Anne M. Hobart, R-Waterford Township, and Nancy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, to the panel.

Doyon charged the board was playing politics with an appointment which previously hadn't been subject to political pressures. "For over a decade,

we've had bipartisan representation on this board," he said.

Calling it an "attempt to emasculate protections of employees," Doyon said the action destroys safeguards built into the system. He added that neither Hobart nor McConnell has knowledge of the merit system, a set of rules which govern county employment.

REPUBLICANS SAID they chose "the most competent people for the post."

When Doyon asked his Republican colleagues if they were hinting he wasn't competent for the job, Commissioner John E. Olsen, R-Huntington Woods, countered, "I'm disappointed he thinks he's the only one who is qualified to serve on the panel."

Olsen later admitted, however, that some Republicans felt Doyon wasn't an impartial decision-maker.

"I think the feeling was that his own view of equity was much more liberal than you would find among the general populace. Some Republicans felt we ought to get two people who would bring a more balanced, impartial viewpoint to the panel."

MOST DEMOCRATIC commissioners believe this is just one more example of Republicans trying to gain absolute control.

"They've virtually wiped out all Democrats from serving on boards and commissions," said Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield.

"They're like sharks. Once they've tasted the blood, they can't stop."

Pernick believes Republicans are just flexing their muscles.

"They want to show people there is a Republican stronghold left in the state," he said. "My own feeling is that they look upon Oakland County as the last bastion of Republicanism."

That view could be detrimental to Oakland County taxpayers, Pernick contended.

"If Democrats have demonstrated leadership ability, it's not utilized. If we have good relationships with (Democratic) legislators, we won't be in a position to use that influence."

FOR EXAMPLE, Pernick said, Commissioner Betty Fortino, D-Pontiac, played a major role in approaching Democratic legislators to help get a \$1.2-million grant for Glen Oaks County Park in Farmington Hills. Don Deni, a Waterford Township Democrat, and member of the Parks Commission last year, also had contacts in Lansing.

But neither won a seat on the parks board. The Republican majority reappointed Parks Chairman Lewis Wint and appointed Commissioner Richard R. Wilcox, R-Orionville, to succeed Deni, whose term expired Jan. 1.

Pernick contends the appointments represent a significant departure from past practice.

"When Democrats were in the majority, we tried to balance our representation," he said.

"We had a bipartisan Road Commission. Both Democrats and Republicans

served as delegates to SEMCOG."

Currently, Republicans serve on the three-member Road Commission and as delegates and alternates to SEMCOG.

Pernick believes County Executive Daniel T. Murphy played an important role in swaying Republican commissioners.

"He doesn't make those decisions (board and commission appointments) directly. But he's made it clear that Republicans would like to have absolute control over all county operations."



Republicans are "like sharks. Once they've tasted the blood, they can't stop," says Democratic Commissioner Larry Pernick. (This is actually a 10-foot lemon shark at Sea World.)

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