

# No fight with Robertson

## Lawmakers abandon party rule bill

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Republican legislative leaders have abandoned a plan to tilt membership in the GOP State Committee in favor of mainstream supporters of George Bush.

Nevertheless, local Republican state senators would like to undo the work of followers of evangelist Pat Robertson in the GOP structure.

"A lot of experience and devotion are going down the drain," said Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, of the Robertson effort to cut the power of officeholders in party affairs.

HOUSE MINORITY leader Paul Hillegonds, R-Holland, urged members to abandon a plan to dilute the strength of conservatives on the Republican State Committee. The RSC, the 101-member governing body of the party between elections, is controlled by a conservative coalition of forces loyal to presidential candidates Robertson and Jack Kemp.

A spokesman for Senate Majority Leader John Engler, R-Mount Pleasant, said Engler would "go along" with Hillegonds.

"They've either seen the light or felt the heat," said Lori Packer, Robertson's Michigan leader, praising Hillegonds and Engler for backing down. She called the plan "stuffing the ballot box."

The Hillegonds plan was to give him and Engler power to appoint 10 members apiece to the RSC. That could tilt control of the body to sup-



Rep. Paul Hillegonds saw light? or felt heat?

porters of Vice President Bush's White House aspirations.

The Senate had been scheduled to vote this week on an Engler amendment to an otherwise obscure elections bill.

BUT COLLAPSE of the plan still left Republican lawmakers with a problem — they're shut out of party conventions.

The Republican State Committee was taken over in 1986 by the Robertson-Kemp coalition. Recently RSC amended the convention delegation rules to end a longstanding policy of naming elected officials as at-

large delegates to county conven-

tions. The decision barred some 1,200 officeholders and unsuccessful nominees, most of them Bush supporters, from being seated as at-large delegates to the Jan. 14 district conventions.

Attorneys for the nominees are preparing a lawsuit to fight the decision. They say party officials told them they'd have at-large status.

The delegates to the county conventions will select about 1,800 attendees for the Jan. 29-30 state convention. In turn, the state convention will pick Michigan's 27 national convention delegates — the first in the U.S. Current odds are that it will be favorable to Robertson.

THE PARTY decision left Republican Sens. Crue, Robert Geake of Northville, Richard Fessler of Commerce and Rudy Nichols of Waterford unhappy.

Geake told his northwestern Wayne County Republican friends in prepared comments:

"State law and national Republican rules give nominated and elected officials at-large delegate seats at county conventions."

"Many of us who are state legislators relied on those rules and did not run for precinct delegate, to allow newer members of the party to be elected."

"We made room for a lot of new precinct delegates, many of whom are Kemp and Robertson delegates, which is fine with me — I want new members in the party regardless of

who they happen to support for president."

But then the Kemp and Robertson people on RSC "changed the rules to take away the right of the Republican public officials to vote at our own county conventions."

"Now we want to use our votes in the Legislature to change the rules back. What's wrong with that?"

CRUCE SAID people overlook the fact that "longtime party builders are summarily disenfranchised" by the new rule.

Like Geake, Nichols said he declined to run for precinct delegate because "I presumed I was a delegate at-large. I should have a say in the party's decisions," said the second-term senator, noting that he had worked six or seven years in the party before being elected five years ago.

Fessler noted GOP leaders were sure to have difficulty winning enough Democratic votes to pass the bill. But Fessler said he would have supported Engler.

Nichols agreed.

Hillegonds said what the Robertson-Kemp people did was hurting the party. "I'm a Bush supporter, but more than anything else, I'm a House Republican leader who wants to win seats in the next election," Hillegonds said. "What's going on in the party right now detracts from that effort."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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