Jackson's backers warm to Bentsen

By Tim Richard
staff writer

ATLANTA — They may have wanted Jesse Jackson in the No. 2 spot, but his Michigan supporters are ready to accept Sen. Lloyd Bentsen as the vice presidential running mate of Michael Dukakis.

"He's going to do justice to the ticket and the party. He'll play a very important role," said Patricia Hough, Jackson alternate from Westland, choosing her words carefully.

"He'll add balance to the ticket," Pontiac Mayor Walter Moore said, although he sees the ticket as middle-of-the-road, conservative and lacking a liberal like Jackson.

Bentsen's age, 67, may make the Texan more palatable, Moore said, because he is less likely to follow Dukakis as a presidential nominee, the way Nixon followed Eisenhower, Johnson followed Kennedy and Mondale followed Carter.

"Bentsen has reached as high as he's going to go," Moore said. "Let's hope nothing happens to Mike Dukakis."

"I URGED Bentsen's people to bring staff and that he come to Michigan right away," said U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Southfield, a Dukakis supporter.

Although Levin's 17th Congressional District has a strong Jackson contingent, Levin sees Bentsen as a plus on the ticket.

"On issues like welfare, reform, trade and health care, Bentsen's an asset."

The vice presidential nominee, unlike Dukakis, supports aid to the Nicaraguan contras, President Reagan's 1981 tax cuts, the MX missile, the B-1 bomber, research for the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"), school prayer and the oil-import fee.

THE SUPERDELEGATE system will go. That's the word from leaders of both the Dukakis and Jackson camps for 1992.

Superdelegates are members of Congress and top party officials who are picked as national convention delegates by virtue of their public office. In Michigan, they tended to be overwhelmingly for Dukakis although Jackson won a 2-1 victory in the March caucus votes among rank-and-file Democrats.

"This was not just a Michigan problem," said U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit, a Jackson supporter. "Jesse Jackson won 13 states. Last night (Wednesday's convention balloting,) he won four."

TOP PARTY leaders agreed to cast an 80-80 tie vote on the convention floor.

"We made a decision to go in with an even vote," said Joel Ferguson, the Michigan State University trustee who is Jackson's chief in Michigan. "Jesse wanted to use the super delegates as an educational thing."

Ferguson denied rumors that Jackson delegates ever planned to walk out.

Conyers, however, said he was "highly ticked off that I couldn't get my friends (other members of Congress) to toss us a few delegates votes . . . What harm would there be in 82-80 (Jackson victory) in a state where Jackson won 2-1?" he asked. "We (blacks) are going to be asked to pull the most faithful part of the Democratic constituency."

Conyers said he did in fact walk out. But Jackson spokesman Ferguson said, "It's not a walkout as far as we're concerned."

CONYERS TOLD the full Michigan caucus a few minutes later that party rules in 1992 would be amended to reduce the proportion of uncommitted superdelegates from more than 15 percent to less than 10 percent. Winner-take-all systems in six states also will go, Conyers said.

Dukakis chief Dennis Hertel, representative from Harper Woods, told reporters "You can't change the system in the midst of the system." As for a few Dukakis superdelegates crossing over, Hertel said, "Which delegates? Who would be the ones?"

Michigan had 162 delegates, of whom 24 were superdelegates.

The 80-80 vote meant two votes weren't cast. Who was missing?

Chairman Rick Wiener replied, "Chris Smith of the 16th District, a Gephardt delegate, left. There was no way to credential him (an alternate). The other was myself — I abstained."

DETROIT MAYOR Coleman A. Young was virtually invisible — he attended no caucuses or delegation parties — until Thursday morning's caucus, the last of the convention. He's a Dukakis supporter.

"Y'all kicked ass," Young said to the Jackson delegates. "Now is the time to remove that boot from our brother's derriere."

A delegate in the audience chimed in: "Let George have it."

U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Michigan, was a classmate of Dukakis at Swarthmore, the Quaker-run private college, in Massachusetts. Levin told one story to assure Jackson delegates that the presidential nominee practiced what he talked about on civil rights.

"That was 35 years ago. I know I don't look that old," Levin said. "He was Mr. Democrat on campus. I tried to nudge him a little.

"He wasn't born with a silver spoon or a silver foot in his mouth. He worked.

"In the 50s, the town barber wouldn't cut the hair of black students. Mike Dukakis decided to compete by opening up his own little barbershop. He did cut their hair.

"He doesn't read cue cards. We've had enough charisma. We're ready for competence."

Dukakis
Dukakis
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DOUG ASHLEY

Michigan delegates joined the convention hall crowd in Atlanta in cheering Gov. Michael Dukakis as the Democratic Party's standard bearer in November's presidential election.

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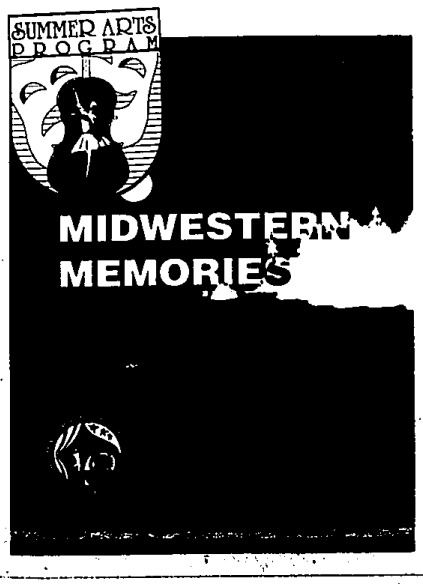

"Behind the bruises," Joan Young said, "was as lovely a child as I'd ever seen."

"I was appointed to represent the baby in this case. The father was 18, the mother was 17. He claimed the baby fell out of the car seat. Thirty days later, when she was back in the hospital with another skull fracture, he said she rolled off of the sofa. Well, at six weeks, that sweet little thing couldn't tell us what happened. Finally, he admitted that he hit her."

If you talk with Joan Young, she'll tell you that children are the biggest concern of the Oakland County Probate Court. More than half the court's cases have to do with the well-being of children, with the stability of their lives, with the illegal things some of them do, and with the possibility of their futures.

Joan Young began preparing for the job of probate judge when she started her public service career 19 years ago as a social worker. She's been a trial lawyer, a family law attorney, and administrator of Oakland County's Circuit Court, Michigan's busiest.

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