

Howe out to make the most of experience, gender

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Three races for Oakland County administrative offices are contested in the Aug. 4 primary. Candidates for drain commissioner and sheriff were profiled in previous editions. See related editorial.

Her bumper sticker says it all, as far as Elizabeth P. Howe is concerned. "Not One of the Boys."

The gender reference is obvious, of course. Howe is the only woman — Republican or Democrat — running for Oakland County Executive, the county's highest elected office, a definite plus in what some political observers insist is the year of the woman.

Equally important, Howe said, is the phrase "Not one of the Boys." Males have dominated Oakland politics for generations, she said.

Not only is she female, Howe said, but she is outside the loop. She's not "one of the good ol' boys," who have made major political and economic decisions without any concern for women, Republican or Democrat.

Good ol' boys

"Brooks Patterson is the continu-

■ 'My budget as director of labor was \$100 million more than the county executive's budget.'

Betty Howe

ation of the good ol' boy network and philosophy," said Howe, referring to the Republican she hopes to face in the Nov. 3 general election.

The old boy network wants to snout Patterson, Howe said. She wants to change all that.

Howe's strategy so far is to ignore Philip R. Marcuse, the Democrat she's running against in the Aug. 4 primary, and concentrate on the Republican she presumes she'll face in November — the old boy she jokingly refers to as Louis B. Patterson, even though he's better known as L. Brooks Patterson.

But Howe doesn't expect to upset Patterson — an acknowledged GOP heavyweight — merely because of her gender or her status as an outsider. Even the most avid feminist wouldn't go for that.

Qualified

She's touting herself as a qualified woman.

As the former director of the Michigan Department of Labor — and the most powerful woman in the administration of former Gov.

James Blanchard — Howe is ready to compare her administrative and leadership qualities against anyone.

"My budget as director of labor was \$100 million more than the county executive's budget," she said.

As head of the department that administered the Michigan Employment Security Commission and enforced OSHA (Occupational, Safety and Health Administration) standards, she's balanced larger budgets and supervised more departments, more people.

She also has more experience in the private sector, Howe said, referring to her years as a public relations executive with the Bendix Corp. in Southfield.

Furthermore, she has a better knowledge of Oakland County government and how it should run, Howe said.

Backed executive

In the mid 1970s, while she was chairwoman of the county Democrats, Howe was one of those urging



Oakland voters to reform and streamline their form of county government.

She and others advocated a switch from the three-member Board of Auditors — which administered county government at the direction of the Board of Commissioners — to the county executive form of government that concentrated power in one office.

Not only did Howe want a county executive, she wanted one directly elected, rather than appointed by the Board of Commissioners. "I

wanted an executive who was answerable to the voters," Howe said, "not one beholden to county commissioners."

Oakland's first election for county executive in 1974 was won by Daniel T. Murphy, who beat his Democratic opponent, Eugene W. Kuthy, by fewer than 2,000 votes. Murphy was re-elected four times, but is retiring this year after almost 40 years of involvement in county government.

Although she backed Kuthy and other Democrats against Murphy, Howe is not overly critical of the way Murphy ran Oakland County. "I wish he would have used his popularity to push for charter reform," she said. "That would have completed the reform started when we went to a county executive."

The reform Howe wants to complete includes a legislative change that would enable Oakland to go to a home-rule form of county government, similar to that in Wayne County.

Among other things, such a change would bring the road commission for Oakland County under the direct control of the county. The road commission is presently an independent agency, financed largely with gasoline taxes and adminis-

tered by three road commissioners, all men, appointed by the Board of Commissioners.

"Bringing the road commission under the control of the county would provide more accountability for the millions of dollars spent on roads," Howe said.

But that's years down the road, after a commission is authorized — and elected — to revise Oakland's charter.

Will push reform

In the meantime, Howe said she's prepared to lead Oakland County under its present form of government, while continuing to push for reform. The first thing she'll do after being elected, is to form a working relationship with county commissioners — preferably male and female commissioners — to address concerns such as the Oakland's ability to provide mental health care.

"We've got to work together," she said. If the men refused to cooperate, Howe said she'd form a working alliance with female commissioners to get things done.

And what needs to be done?

For starters, the county must get away from what Howe believes is its penchant to solve problems by building.

Women aren't leaders, maverick candidate says

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

By his own admission, Philip R. Marcuse is a maverick Democrat — somebody who doesn't necessarily adhere to the party philosophy.

"I'm more Republican than party officials want to see," said Marcuse, 52, who thinks Democrats have rightly been criticized as the tax and spend party.

He wants no part of that label, and insists, "I'm a result-oriented Democrat."

Any distinctions he draws, however, don't stop Marcuse from seeking the Democratic nomination for

Oakland County Executive. He's vying with party favorite Elizabeth P. Howe in the Aug. 4 primary for the Democratic nomination.

Howe is not qualified to be county executive, Marcuse says, because she isn't a woman. "Women are not leaders, they're supporters."

The winner will face Republican heavyweight L. Brooks Patterson, the well-known former Oakland County prosecutor, in the Nov. 3 general election. Patterson is unopposed in the primary.

Marcuse, a clerk for Oakland Circuit Judge John N. O'Brien, showed his independence from main-line Democrats in May by announcing he would seek the party's nomination — necessitating a resource-consuming primary.

Won't spend much

That primary won't be costly to



him, at least in terms of money, said Marcuse, who vows to spend less than \$1,000. But it will help voters decide who is the better can-

■ 'I don't favor regional government. I'm merely recognizing a de facto shift in the power base of the metroplex.'

Philip Marcuse

didate to oppose Patterson.

Patterson would be a disaster for Oakland County, Marcuse insists, because he is insincere and inexperienced as an administrator. "When he was prosecutor, he hired someone to run the office while he was off doing radio shows and writing newspaper columns."

As prosecutor, Patterson worked with — and had leverage over — numerous lawyers. "The job of executive is different," Marcuse said. "It requires more vision, more leadership."

Marcuse said he envisions Oak-

land County as the economic, cultural and governmental hub of southeast Michigan. "Detroit is no longer the center of the metroplex."

Businesses — as well as the "best and brightest" residents — have moved from Detroit to Oakland County, Marcuse said. And that fact should be recognized by declaring Oakland as the center of southeast Michigan.

"I don't favor regional government," he said. "I'm merely recognizing a de facto shift in the power base of the metroplex."

Likes Murphy's vision

Marcuse lauds the job outgoing executive Daniel T. Murphy has done as Oakland's only county executive. County government under Murphy didn't show leadership, Marcuse said, it led.

Under Murphy, Oakland government functions so smoothly, "most people didn't know there was a county government," Marcuse said. "That's the way I want to keep it."

Marcuse said he favors county government that functions forcefully behind the scenes, with little or no fanfare.

And the function of county government, he said, is to help business and industry do business in Oakland. That entails keeping taxes down, providing good services and promoting a good climate.

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