

Bush country

Area Republicans plot campaign

BY WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

George Bush has about as much chance of losing Oakland County as the Dream Team did of losing the Olympic basketball gold medal to Angola.

But the president's fortunes aren't so bright elsewhere and Bush must post a Dream Team-like victory in Oakland if he's to carry Michigan.

"We need your help," state campaign director Colleen Pero said Monday to Oakland County Young Republicans. "Talk him up to your friends, write letters to newspapers, call the phone-in radio shows."

Young Republicans, those age 18-40, are planning a grassroots effort as never before on the president's behalf.

POLITICS

"We're targeting the presidential race. We plan on being very active," said Linda Kurkchian of Southfield. "Nothing can be taken for granted. We're telling people this isn't the '80s anymore."

But if Republicans are planning a grassroots campaign, it's clear the roots need tending.

Club members appeared more critical than enthusiastic during a question and answer session with Pero.

Why can't the GOP adopt a more open stance on abortion? asked one young blonde woman. "It's going to be a pro-president platform," Pero said. "And the president is pro-life."

The question becomes moot: a

GOP platform subcommittee that same day overwhelmingly upheld the party's call for a constitutional amendment banning abortion.

Other questioners called on the president to drop advisers, strike a consistent campaign theme or at least change his recent television ads.

"I'm sorry," said one suspender and Hush Puppies-clad young man. "But they make him look really sad."

Then there are those pesky polls showing the president consistently trailing Democratic nominee Bill Clinton.

Even Pero is worried the polls are producing a "feeding frenzy" in the media. But Pero, an adviser to Gov. John Engler, has experience reviving candidates written off for dead.

Engler himself was down by double digits in a poll published two days before his 1990 upset victory.

Polls can change, she noted, especially in the wake of this week's national convention in Houston.

"We're only starting to get our word out," Pero said. Will that word include Clinton-bashing?

"We're going to be running hard at his record as governor," Pero said. "George Bush has a record but so does Bill Clinton. We're asking people to compare. There are clear differences. Is it Clinton-bashing to point them out? I don't think so."

Pero predicts a victory for Bush on the order of Engler's narrow win. "Fifty-one, 49," she said, predicting the outcome.

Every vote counts, Pero said. And she's counting every vote.

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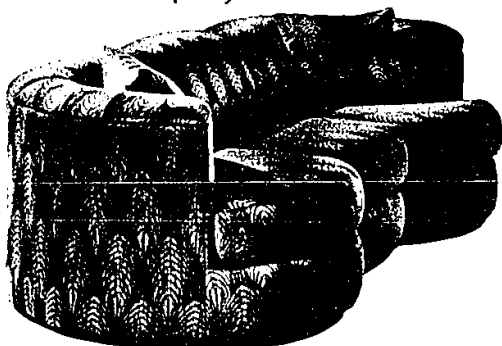
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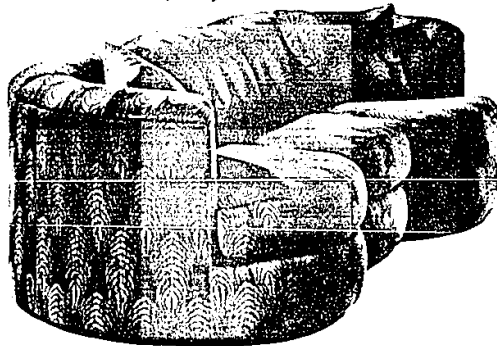
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