

GOP chums say Patterson has matured, mellowed

By Pat Murphy
STAFF WRITER

Is the L. Brooks Patterson running for Oakland County executive different from the man who made a reputation years ago by being tough on criminals — including welfare chancers — and bashing Detroit?

Definitely, say some Oakland County Republicans, including Cris Burnard of Birmingham. "I think he's matured," said Burnard, a rank-and-file Republican who is not reluctant to criticize her own party or its officials.

"Brooks has been known to pop off occasionally," Burnard said. "But I think that's changing. I think he's growing."

Not so, insist Democrats, including Elizabeth "Betty" Howe, who believes she can beat Patterson and become Oakland's next county executive.

Howe's campaign depicts the former prosecutor as part of the "old boy network" she says has characterized area politics for generations. "He's always pointed himself as a populist. That certainly hasn't changed."

The subject of Patterson's political maturity came up last week following a press conference with Drain Commissioner George Kuln at which he dispelled rumors about Oakland County having a "budget shortfall" in the 1993 fiscal year.

"The 1993 fiscal year will experience an increase over the 1992 fiscal year in the amount of \$6.3 million,"



L. Brooks Patterson

and Patterson, as if trying to demonstrate his knowledge about fiscal responsibility.

He also talked about streamlining county government by shifting some functions within the Department of Public Works to the drain commissioner's office — a move that would eliminate some jobs, but more importantly promote more efficiency, he said.

It may be coincidence, but Howe has been focusing her campaign on inefficiency within Oakland government. Among the remedies she said she will push is reforming county government by pushing to complete the restructuring started in 1976

when Oakland went to an elected county executive.

Howe wants to, among other things, give the county more control over roads and to combine some functions... such as those within the Department of Public Works and the drain commissioner's office.

What was Patterson doing last week with talk about the budget, and shifting DPW functions to the drain commissioner? Was he negotiating some of his opponent's arguments? Or was he giving a thoughtful glimpse of where he'd like to take Oakland County government?

James M. Alexander, GOP county chairman, is among those who think Patterson has a deeper side that didn't come across when he was prosecutor and building his tough reputation. "I don't think 'maturity' is the right word," he said. "I believe he's always had a deeper side that didn't come across when he was fighting the bad guys."

"Now (in his role as would-be county executive) everybody's getting the chance to voice those views. Now people are seeing his vision."

What about Patterson's image — fostered by newspaper columns — as a Detroit basher? Is that any example of Patterson's "vision"?

Patterson has always been pro-Oakland County, Alexander said. "There's certainly nothing wrong with that. If something is good for

Oakland and Detroit, Brooks is for it."

"If something is neutral for Oakland, but good for Detroit, Brooks favors it. But if something is bad for Oakland — but good for Detroit — he is opposed to it. That's not Detroit bashing."

Alexander acknowledges Patterson probably remembers his 1982 race against Attorney General Frank J. Kelley, which Patterson

lost by 468,309 votes statewide, despite carrying Oakland County by 10,117 votes.

Some felt Patterson was hurt in that race by the perception — correct or otherwise — that he was strong on crime-related issues, but weak on other aspects of government and leadership.

That won't happen this time, said Alexander. "Patterson has a lot more depth about government. And

he's showing it."

Among those who think the former prosecutor has always shown the necessary leadership abilities is Andrea L. Fischer, a Republican who serves with Patterson on the Oakland University Board of Trustees.

"I've always been a fan of Brooks," she said. "I thought he would have been a good county executive 10 years ago."

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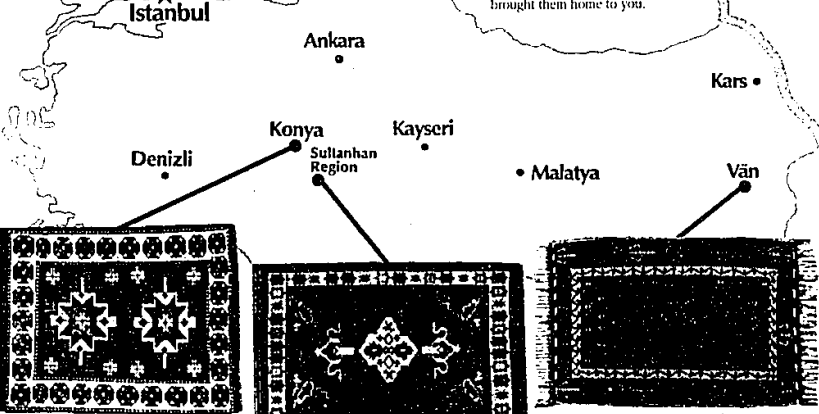
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