

Patterson rejects regional approach to area's issues

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

One big change L. Brooks Patterson will make as Oakland County executive is to be less chummy with Wayne County and Detroit over regional issues.

Among the issues are the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments' plan to control urban sprawl called the "Regional Development Initiative" and the future of a multi-county bus system.

"I've met with John Amberger (SEMCOG executive director)," said Patterson. "I have some real concerns about some SEMCOG programs such as RDI, the regional development initiative which says 'turn the future of Oakland County to this new layer of government, and we'll take care of everything; we'll redirect investment to Detroit, we'll collect your property taxes, and we'll distribute them.'"

"That's not going to happen under a Patterson administration. I'll fight that tooth and nail. I will not turn the future of Oakland County over to some regional planners. RDI and I are not going to be in sync."

Patterson, 53, Oakland's colorful prosecutor from 1962-88, will succeed the retiring Daniel T. Murphy, who chaired SEMCOG, bought the idea of halting urban sprawl and tried to help SMART, the suburban bus system. Both are Republicans, but Patterson reflects the conservative views of county board members hostile to SEMCOG.

Meanwhile, several northern Oakland townships elected supervisors on platforms of controlled growth. And even post-World War II suburbs in mid-county are worried about a megamall destined for Auburn Hills.

"I don't envision putting an industrial belt in the north tier of Oakland County," Patterson said in a taping of WXYZ-TV's "Spotlight on News" scheduled for broadcast next weekend.

"I-75 is the corridor known nationally, even internationally, as Automation Alley. There are plenty of opportunities for what I consider quality growth so we can provide the jobs we need in Oakland County," said Patterson, citing the county's expected population growth from 1.1 million to 1.4 million by the end of the decade.

"Right now, we have 13 institutions of higher learning. We have 50,000 kids in those colleges. When they graduate, we don't want to export our kids. We want to export the quality products we make in Oakland County, so we've gotta have jobs to do that."

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Murphy was active in SEMCOG. Coleman Young, mayor of Detroit for years, never attended a SEMCOG meeting. Will Patterson be like Murphy or Young?

"I think I'll be in between," he said, but he won't ignore the regional agency. "When you ignore it, up pop programs like RDI."

'No' to bus tax

Patterson noted he had rejected one idea harmful to Detroit — putting Oakland County in a separate metropolitan statistical area.

"If we were to cut Detroit out, our numbers would improve because of the unfortunate times that have hit the major city. I looked at that and found that from a national marketing standpoint Detroit would go from fifth to 16th. I said, 'Why inflict that on Detroit?' I don't see any damage under the present system."

"Patterson opposes trying to rescue SMART, the suburban bus system, with a dedicated tax — a tax increase.

"My friend Ed McNamara (Wayne County executive) has called for a quarter of a percent raise in the sales tax to fund transportation programs. I wouldn't be for that. Oakland County would put in \$37 million — the most — and we have only 2,600 riders. So we'd pay more and use it less," he said.

He also differs with "my friend" Dennis Archer, announced mayoral candidate in Detroit, on merging Detroit's D-DOT bus system with SMART. "You don't take two failed systems, merge them and expect anything better than a major failed system," he said.

Patterson's appointment of John Grubba as one of his chief

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deputies also sent a cool message on public transportation to the rest of the region. Grubba, long the managing director of the Road Commission for Oakland County, considers the automobile as the best method of mass transit.

"We (the and Grubba) have already discussed starting with a community-based transportation

system and building out. I don't think you can impose huge 66-passenger buses on Woodward and expect that system to succeed. John and I talked about using a sophisticated computer system to hook into the 300 private operators who move people back and forth. It's never been coordinated."

Threat on right

Patterson dismissed as "in-house politics" a flareup at the Nov. 18 Republican County Convention, a one-evening event. He nominated county chair Jim Alexander for the convention chair, but Alexander was defeated by Ferndale attorney Robert Anderson from the GOP's conservative wing.

"A lot of people said afterwards we're trying to send the chairman a message not to forget us little people out there. I think Jim Alexander got the message, loud and clear," Patterson said.

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