

# Dems look for candidate, GOP for ammunition

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

Area Democrats and Republicans are trying to change political gears quickly in the wake of the decision by U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle not to seek re-election next year.

Democrats are looking for a new candidate — with the name of former governor James Blanchard surfacing most frequently.

While Republicans are looking for new campaign ammunition, as well as a strong candidate.

"We've lost the savings and loan scandal as an issue," said Oakland GOP chairman James Alexander. "And Spence (front runner Spencer Abraham) will have to get rid of his 1986 Chevrolet."

The scandal, of course, is the lingering allegation that Riegle improperly solicited campaign contributions from savings and loan kingpin Charles Keating.

The Chevy is a prop Abraham planned to use to remind voters that Riegle has been in politics since 1966. Republicans, including Wayne County chairman Edward L. Haroutunian, see him as a kind of poster child for term

limitations.

Riegle announced he would not seek re-election in an emotional speech from the Senate floor Tuesday. The Flint native said he could have won re-election, but he chose not to run because of personal concerns, namely he wanted to spend more time with his family.

"I know how he feels," said former U.S. Rep. William M. Brodhead who represented parts of Redford, Southfield and the Farmington area for eight years before stepping down in 1982. "That was a big part of why I retired."

Oakland County commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick said he believes family considerations are the overriding reasons for Riegle's decision.

"Riegle has been a good senator, and I think he would have won re-election. But his family means a lot to him."

Oakland Democratic county chairman, Donald L. Tucker, said he has known Riegle for about 25 years. "He's always been a dedicated and responsive public servant, and I believe he was unjustly tarnished by the savings and loan

scandal.

Not all Democrats share that opinion, however. County commissioner Jeff Kingzett of Auburn Hills, for example, had a one-word response when asked about Riegle's decision: "Good."

Jim Elsmann, a Birmingham lawyer who last year said he will seek the GOP nomination for the U.S. Senate, also applauded Riegle's decision. "That was the best decision he could have made . . . best for himself and best for the body politic."

"Now the campaign won't focus on Don Riegle, the race will focus on important issues — like NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)."

Like Riegle, Elsmann is opposed to NAFTA. "Instead of bashing Don Riegle, I (and other candidates) can focus on the five or six reasons I think NAFTA is a bad deal."

As for a possible successor, Democrats and Republicans agree on one thing: The field is wide open.

"There's no shortage of potential candidates on our side," said Paul Ashba of Rochester Hills who is a delegate to the Democratic State Central Committee.

"Hopefully (U.S. Rep) Dale Kildee will be one of those people who considers running," said Democrat, Retha Clark of Rochester. "Replacing Riegle will be difficult, but Kildee could do it."

The list of potential candidates seems to be growing by the hour, according to Brodhead who now lives in Bingham Farms. "Rumors are flying all over."

Among Democrats, he said State Sen. Lana Pollack of Ann Arbor has to be considered a strong candidate. "But you can't rule out Jim Blanchard and Ed McNamara."

"For a Senate race a candidate needs three things," he continued, "a record, the ability to raise money and an ability to deal with the issues. Blanchard and McNamara have proven records in all three areas. So does Sen. Pollack."

U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-12th District, said it's much too early to speculate about who the Democratic candidate will likely be, with one exception: "I'm not interested."

Birmingham businessman Marvin Meltzer, however, insists there's only one logical choice, James Blanchard. "He had a good record as governor and he has a good relationship with President Clinton."

"The field may be wide open, but Blanchard would obviously be a good candidate."

Bloomfield Hills, agrees that his longtime friend would be a good candidate. "But he certainly enjoys being an ambassador," he said.

Thayer said he had not talked with Blanchard since Riegle made his announcement. "So I really don't know about his plans."

A statement released by his office in Ottawa, Canada, quotes Blanchard as being "shocked and saddened" that Riegle is stepping down. The former governor praised Riegle for his 28 years in government and wished him and his family well.

But the statement made no mention of Blanchard's plans.

Another possible frontrunner, Wayne County Executive McNamara, was also out of the country. "He's in Ireland for a family vacation. I don't even know if he knows about Riegle's decision."

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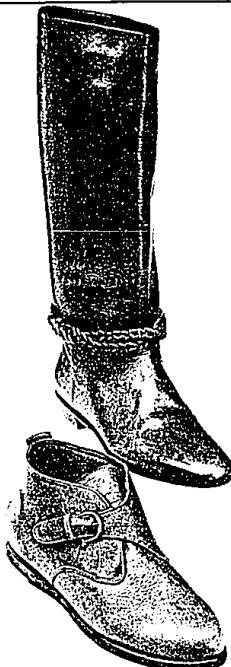
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