

County may privatize EMS

By PAT MURPHY

Staff Writer

Oakland County wants out of its Emergency Medical Service contract, but not immediately.

County Executive L. Brooks Patterson says it's a matter of principle: Government shouldn't be doing something more appropriately handled by the private sector. He wants to privatize.

Officials, however, insist the county's privatize is an attempt to steer county business to people who contributed money to Patterson's 1992 campaign.

"There is a company that wanted this business," said Gregory R. Beauchemin, president and chief executive officer of Community EMS in Southfield. "And it appears they had support in the executive's office."

"But it's not going to happen," said Beauchemin, whose company provides ambulance service to Farmington Hills, Walled Lake, Rochester Hills, Livonia, Redford and 13 other communities in Oakland and Wayne counties.

Beauchemin said his opinion comes from gut instincts and his knowledge of the ambulance business. But he said it's reinforced

by an anonymous letter delivered to the chief executives at 10 hospitals, including Botsford General, Crittenton, Providence and St. Joseph Mercy.

The letter was part of a packet containing copies of documents from the Friends of L. Brooks Patterson campaign finance report. The letter states, among other things, "... it appears as though campaign promises were made so that the 'O' Com contract would be terminated and then transferred to Paramed, Inc."

The anonymous letter further states, "The building for the Friends of L. Brooks Patterson (one of Patterson's election committees) campaign headquarters was owned by Paramed, Inc. (sic) officials, who provided \$8,056 of in-kind campaign contributions for 'use of a commercial building.'"

Commissioner David L. Muffett, R-Farmington Hills, one of several county officials contacted, said he is among those who believe Patterson would never steer a contract or show favoritism. "His intentions have always been honorable."

The "O' Com contract" is an

agreement the county made in the early 1980s to help provide radio communications between EMS units and physicians in awaiting hospitals. It enables paramedics to talk with physicians about the patient's condition while hospital personnel prepare special equipment as needed.

"It saved my life," said Irene Scheel, who insists the radio link between the West Bloomfield EMS and Huron Valley Hospital worked for her benefit on Sept. 14 when she suffered what she described as a near fatal asthma attack.

Paramed, Inc., is the Pontiac-based ambulance service that services most of Oakland County.

Thomas R. Gahan, president and CEO of Paramed, Wednesday said he is aware of the anonymous letter and its implications. That letter says there's a relationship between Mr. Rudlaff (Richard Rudlaff) and Mr. Patterson, and that might be true. But it's a legitimate relationship and there's no behind-the-scenes maneuvering between Paramed and the county.

Contacted in his Waterford Township home Wednesday,

Rudlaff said he is indeed a supporter of Patterson's and raised money for several of his campaigns. "I also advocate privatizing the 'O'Com contract. Everybody thinks that means giving it to Paramed, but I don't want that at all. There are better ways."

In an Oct. 14 letter to Patterson, Gahan said Rudlaff resigned from Paramed as an officer last Dec. 31 to pursue personal interests.

Gahan's letter — made available by the executive — also said his company is not interested in taking over the 'O' Com contract. "Recent discussions by the Public Service Committee (of the County Board of Commissioners) ... regarding 'O'Com functions' were discussed at a Paramed Board of Directors' meeting in which it was unanimously agreed that Paramed would not be interested, should it be approached to assume the 'O'Com functions."

He wrote the letter, Gahan said, because of the anonymous letter that accuses his company of conspiring with the executive to get the 'O'Com contract.

"It wasn't a fit," Gahan said. "And I wanted people to know we're not interested."

While Paramed is not interested, according to Gahan, a number of county officials — and a few private citizens — are curious about why the county executive wants to reverse a contract that has been successful for more than a decade.

That curiosity was piqued by a turnabout by the county board's public service committee. On Tuesday, the committee ordered the director of Oakland EMS and Emergency Management Division to do some ground work as the county prepares to end the 'O'Com contract.

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and chief executive officer of the firm effective Nov. 1, 1993.

Headlee said he is not eyeing a U.S. Senate seat vacated by Don Riegle or any other political office.

Headlee, who assumed the leadership of the financially struggling Alexander Hamilton in November 1972, played a big role in nursing it back to financial health.

"After 21 years as chief execu-

tive, assets and earnings are at an all-time high," Headlee said, "and now seems a good time to ease out a little."

"I have 39 grandchildren and look forward to spending more time with them. Our company is strong and the future is bright."

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