

Title sparks dispute among commissioners

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY — Republican members of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners appear determined to give Republican Daniel Murphy the appearance of incumbency in his race against Democrat Eugene Kuthy for county executive.

The Republicans, who hold a majority on the board, are expected to bestow on Murphy the title of county executive — appointing him to head an interim administrative division that will handle the day-to-day operation of county government until an elected county executive takes office in January.

Although the interim position Murphy will hold is not identical to the office of elected county executive, he would then be able to call himself county executive as he campaigns.

Democratic commissioners, who lack the votes to stop the Murphy

appointment, can do little more than protest the move, which they are expected to do Thursday (Sept. 19) when the issue of the administrative division comes before the full board for a vote.

THE ARGUMENTS Democrats are likely to make were previewed this week during committee meetings.

"Saying Dan Murphy is county executive is totally in error," said Commissioner Bernard Lennon, Democratic caucus chairman. "It is strictly a political ploy to give him incumbency designation."

It is an accepted political fact that a candidate running as an incumbent has an advantage over his challenger.

The political infighting over Murphy's title was made possible by an oversight in the legislation by which county voters approved a unified county government under an elected executive.

As interpreted by county counsel, the legislation called for dis-

solving the current administrative arm of the county — the three-man board of auditors — before an elected county executive takes office early next year.

No provisions were made for who would administer the day-to-day operation of county government in the interim period.

THE SITUATION has forced commissioners to devise a method of administering county government until the county executive takes over.

Apparently, there is little disagreement to the current proposal to form an interim administrative division to act in that capacity.

Since Murphy is current chairman of the board of auditors and has been the chief administrator at the county for 11 years, few quarrel that he is the logical choice to head the interim division.

It is his title, however, that has become a battleground. One Republican commissioner

argued it would be misleading to voters not to give Murphy incumbent status.

"MURPHY HAS been chief administrator for 11 years," argued Pat Nowack (R-25). "I don't think you should create in the mind of the public that he is not chief administrator. He does, in fact, carry on most of the same duties that the county executive will."

Commissioners must act on the interim division Thursday. Actually, the board of auditors is officially dissolved at midnight Wednesday. Until a substitute administration is proposed Thursday morning, the county will legally lack an authorized administration.

Although the administrative division is expected to be quickly established by commissioners, several Democrats will issue proposals on related issues.

Lennon said he will urge commissioners to limit the tenure of

the administrative division, calling for it to be dissolved as soon as an elected executive takes office.

The current proposal places no limits on the tenure of the division. Another motion will ask that

Burn fund underway

Cannisters for contributions to the National Institute of Burn Medicine will be placed throughout the Central Business District on Saturday morning.

Money will be used to provide better care for burn patients in Michigan.

"There is only one burn center in Michigan, at Ann Arbor," said Bill Gardner, president of the Birmingham Firefighters Association. "We are trying to raise money to provide care units throughout the state."

Gardner will show a film to serv-

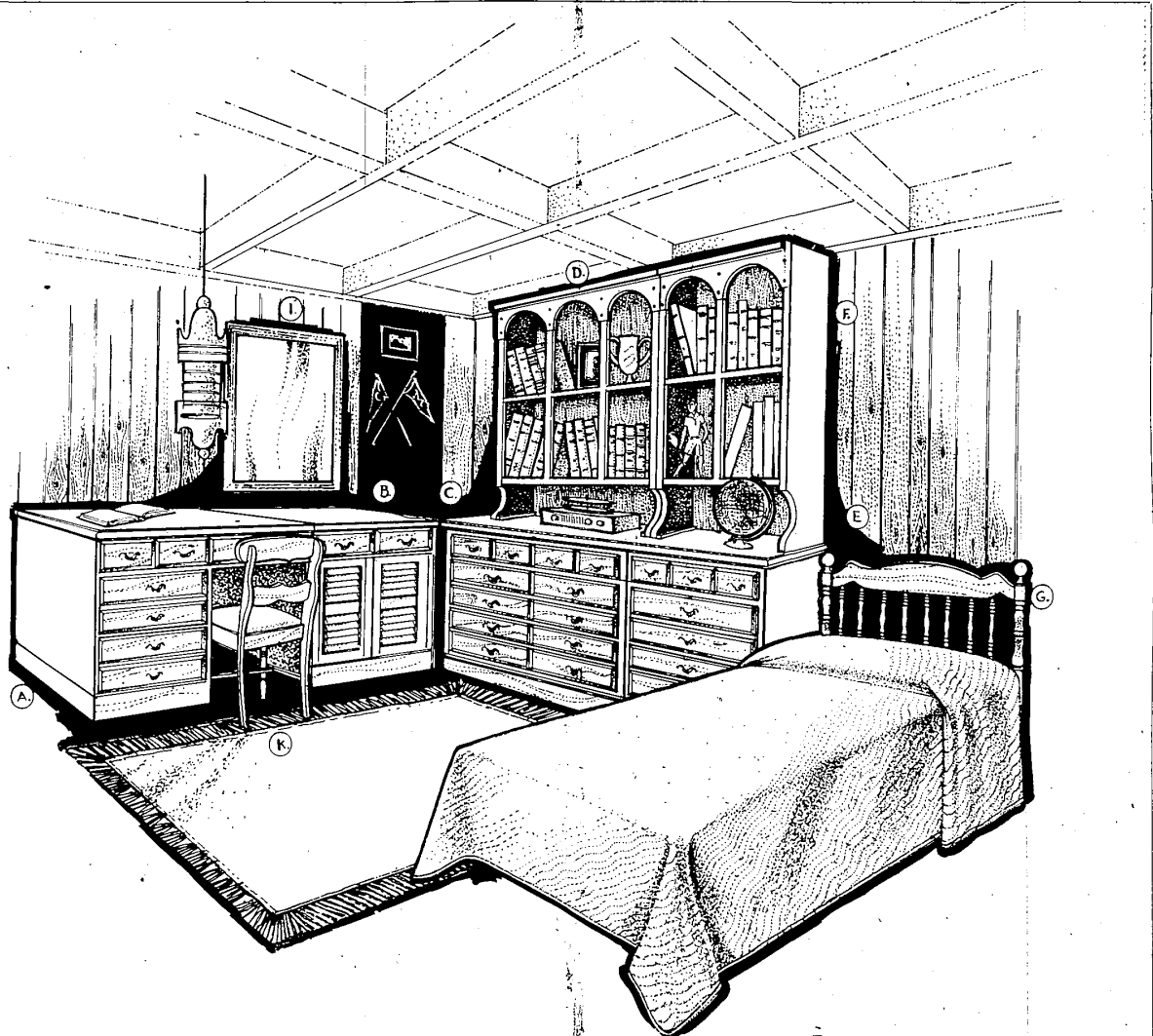
Murphy be given a title other than county executive, one which wouldn't confuse the interim office he would hold with the office that will be filled by county voters this November.

ice clubs in Birmingham next week, to get their support of the program.

The film "A Fighting Chance," narrated by George C. Scott, is the true case of a nine-year-old Michigan girl who was burned at a cottage in Clare.

It shows facilities that should be available through the United States and Michigan, Gardner said.

The program is cosponsored by the National Jaycees, International Association of Firefighters and International Association of Fire Chiefs.



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