

Michigan ROUNDUP

January 10, 1992

Legislative Week in Review

- The House and Senate returned to session this week. Their three-week holiday recess was preceded by marathon debates culminating in the passage of a last-minute, ninety-day sunset extension and rate freeze on **no-fault auto insurance**. The legislation subsequently was signed by the governor, as was funding for a statewide **medical program** for the elderly and the indigent. Supporters of the latter measure hoped it would be included in a more comprehensive supplemental budget (SB 213), but consensus on that package eluded lawmakers.
- The earliest legislative news of the new year concerns the **FY 1992-93 budget**. Proposals to further curtail already straitened agency budgets—including closing prisons and dropping senior discounts at state parks—were reported in response to the Department of Management and Budget's (DMB) request of department heads to propose ways to trim 5 percent from this year's spending level. The governor's 1992-93 budget message is scheduled for presentation on February 7.
- Budget parameters for the budget will emerge more clearly following the two-day **consensus revenue conference** that will begin January 14. Convened by the DMB and the House and Senate fiscal agencies, the meetings are required under a 1991 law mandating biannual conferences of the three agencies.
- Lawmakers face imminent **redistricting deadlines**. A three-judge panel appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court to recommend a new map of legislative districts must forward its recommendation to the high court by February 15. The panel has ordered state political parties to submit their own proposals by January 15, although the judges say they ultimately may formulate their own plan.
- Governor Engler will deliver his **State of the State Message** to a joint legislative session on January 21 at 8:00 p.m.
- Michigan's congressional delegation continues its tradition of **party line voting**. According to *Congressional Quarterly*—which analyzes annual voting—in 1991 Michigan House members sided with their party an average of 87.1 percent. The state's two senators were even more partisan: Donald Riegle and Carl Levin voted with their party 93 percent and 90 percent, respectively.

Political News

- A coalition of health groups, including the state public health department director, is stumping for a doubling of the state **cigarette tax** to finance new health programs. Gov. Engler wants to assess public sentiment on the proposed increase—which would raise an estimated \$200 million and make Michigan's tobacco levy the nation's highest—before taking a position.
- The most recent opposition to the **Department of Natural Resources (DNR) reorganization** is a suit filed this week by the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) against Governor Engler and DNR Director Roland Harnes. The MUCC seeks to halt implementation of executive orders that eliminate nineteen citizen boards and transfer their authority to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and director. An earlier suit brought by House and Senate Democrats challenging the governor's authority to make these changes is scheduled for a hearing next week. Attorneys for both sides have agreed that implementation of the changes—originally set for January 7—will begin no earlier than February 1. Meanwhile, two new gubernatorial appointments to the NRC—James Hill of Mt. Pleasant and Josephine Spano of Birmingham—give a Republican majority to the seven-member panel, which earlier voted along party lines to oppose the proposed reorganization.
- Delaware's deputy education chief will become Michigan's new **superintendent of public instruction**; Robert Schiller's appointment is expected to take effect February 1. He has a reputation for savvy and innovation and no stated political affiliation. Governor Engler signalled his approval before the State Board of Education announced the selection.
- President George Bush officially was entered as a candidate in Michigan's March 17 **presidential primary** by Gov. Engler, who again will run Bush's state campaign. The governor pledged to mount an aggressive campaign.
- Demonstrators on the Capitol lawn have won an additional three weeks to continue their **protest of homelessness**. The Capitol Committee has rejected the request of a Grand Rapids man to build a shanty on the Capitol lawn, where he planned a hunger strike in behalf of former general assistance recipients.
- Housing problems and fiscal restraint hit home last month when a leaky roof caused extensive water damage to part of the **governor's residence**. Private donations are being sought to repair the 32-year-old structure.