

## Michigan ROUNDUP

January 14, 1993

### *Legislative Week in Review*

- The 87th legislature convened with an historic vote providing **shared partisan leadership** in the House of Representatives for the first time in its history. Republican leader Paul Hillemonds (Holland) will be the chamber's Speaker during January and in alternate months thereafter. House Democratic leader Dennis Hertel (Detroit) will alternate with Hillemonds in the Speaker's chair, under an agreement approved unanimously by the 55 Republicans and 54 Democrats in attendance—Joseph Young, Sr. (D-Detroit) was absent due to illness. Hillemonds is the first member of his party to lead a House session in 24 years.
- The shared power plan—dubbed “the JOA” in reference to the joint operating agreement that links Detroit's two news dailies—requires co-Speakers Hillemonds and Hertel to announce **committee assignments** by Friday. The new plan also provides for each party to move up to 12 bills out of committee to the floor on a tie vote.
- The House greeted its largest class of **legislative newcomers** in a decade, as 27 new representatives were sworn in.
- Across the rotunda in the **Senate chamber** the biennial session opened to a virtually empty gallery, with most observers more interested in the historic happenings in the House. However, the upper chamber made its own history, with more bills—139—introduced on opening day than ever before. With two vacancies created by the successful congressional races of former senators James Barcia (D-Bay City) and Nick Smith (R-Addison), the chamber will not be at full strength until after special elections on March 15. If primaries are required, they will be held on February 23.
- Upon completing opening-day formalities both chambers adjourned until January 26, when Governor John Engler presents his **State of the State** address in the House chamber. Gubernatorial aides say the governor's third annual 30-minute address will focus on property tax reduction, school reform, and economic redevelopment.

### *Political News*

- The Board of State Canvassers last week approved the form of a petition seeking a **one-house legislature**. If it gains sufficient signatures to win a place on the 1994 ballot, the unicameral system would replace both chambers of the existing legislature in 1996. Sixteen new legislative districts would conform to congressional district boundaries and every candidate garnering at least 5 percent of the vote in each district would be seated in a legislative body of 60 to 80 members. Plan backers are led by former state Democratic party chairman and gubernatorial candidate Zolton Ferency. Their petitions must receive just over 256,000 valid signatures in order to place the proposal on the ballot.
- The canvassing board also approved the form of petitions to be circulated by **school finance reform** proponents. The Olmstead/Kearney proposal requires the roll back of school operating millages to 30 mills, with the state required to make up any resulting revenue loss and to finance 50 percent of the cost of K-12 education plus all lottery proceeds. The measure was proposed in the last legislative session by Detroit Board of Education member David Olmstead and University of Michigan professor Philip Kearney.
- The Liquor Control Commission this week unanimously approved a contract to **privatize liquor distribution** systems in the state. A consultant will advise the commission on how to change to a delivery system handled entirely by private contractors.
- “A court in crisis” is how Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Michael Cavanaugh describes the state's **swamped appellate process**. Saying that the court of appeals needs to add 15 more judges, Cavanaugh reported earlier this month that a tide of appeals has created a 4,000-case backlog at the penultimate state bench. Last week, Cavanaugh was elected to his second term as chief of the state's high court.
- The Michigan Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case involving the governor's controversial **reorganization of the Department of Natural Resources**. Legislators and environmental advocates have blocked the restructuring—which would have eliminated 19 existing boards and commissions—by a court of appeals ruling that says the governor lacks requisite authority for the changes.