

Michigan ROUNDUP

January 28, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- “Michigan is on the mend,” Gov. John Engler told Michigan residents in an upbeat **State of the State Address** Tuesday. “Conciliatory” was the adjective frequently used by commentators parsing a text that quoted from the new Democratic president’s inaugural address and sounded a job training theme closely associated with former Democratic Governor James Blanchard. In Engler’s third annual address, he stressed education and hammered on a core theme of property tax relief.
- In the **Senate Finance Committee** the following day, however, reactions were more typically partisan, with Republicans generally favoring Engler’s plan to cut property taxes for schools by 20 percent over three years (down ten percent from the provisions of Proposal C that failed at the polls last November) without restoring the resulting drop in school aid funds, although in-formula school districts likely would be reimbursed. Democrats argued that school finance reform should be tied to any tax-cutting measure.
- A five percent **pay raise for elected officials** will go into effect next year as recommended by the State Officers Compensation Commission (SOCC). Despite negative publicity about the proposed raises during the commission’s hearings and in the legislature, the House failed to muster the necessary two-thirds majority required to turn aside the SOCC recommendation. The state constitution stipulates that a recommendation becomes effective unless both legislative chambers reject it; the House’s failure to do so thus relieved the Senate of the need to vote at all on the controversial measure. House Co-Speaker Paul Hillegonds (R-Holland) spoke in favor of the pay hikes and against HCR 21 which would have rejected them. The measure failed 66–37, 8 votes short of the majority necessary for passage. The new salary schedules give lawmakers an annual wage of \$47,723 and raise the governor’s pay to \$112,025.
- Problems at the **House Fiscal Agency (HFA)** deepened this week with the announcement that six additional agency employees and three contractors were being suspended in a measure characterized as both a cost-cutting and a security move. Those suspended received nearly \$720,000 in payments from the agency’s petty cash fund from 1990–92, according to the *Detroit News*. The FBI, IRS, and U.S. Attorney’s office have involved themselves in the review begun by state police and the state auditor general of allegedly improper payments. Auditors this week determined that the HFA owes more than \$100,000 in health benefits premiums for employees; the funds were borrowed last year from the House budget after the HFA apparently depleted its own budgeted funds.
- Newly appointed as **House Appropriations Committee co-chair** is former vice-chair and 15-term Dearborn Heights Democrat Richard Young. An accountant and former IRS investigator, Young previously had suggested greater involvement of the auditor general in appropriations activity. Young shares leadership of the committee with nine-term Augusta Republican Donald Gilmer.
- The bumper crop of new legislators figure prominently as **committee chairs** in House standing committee assignments. Six first-term Republicans—out of a GOP freshman class of 18—will co-chair standing committees under the shared power agreement previously negotiated. The new Republican representatives and their committees are: Penny Crissman (Rochester), Civil Rights and Women’s Issues; John Llewelyn (Fremont), Consumers; Sandra Hill (Montrose), Housing and Urban Development; Beverly Hammerstrom (Temperance), Mental Health; Allen Lowe (Grayling), Military and Veterans Affairs; and Kim Rheade (Sandusky), Public Retirement. None of the 9 Democratic newcomers were tapped to co-chair the chamber’s 32 committees. The rosters were released this week by Co-Speakers Paul Hillegonds and Curtis (not Dennis, as incorrectly noted in a previous edition) Hertel (D-Detroit).
- The tenth annual **Michigan Education Poll** finds citizen confidence in local public schools at an all-time high. The survey of 800 state residents, conducted by Public Sector Consultants and underwritten by the Upjohn Co., gave state schools a cumulative grade of B-, up from a C+ in 1991. Educators and high-income earners gave the highest grades; lowest grades came from Detroit residents and parents of children attending private schools.
- Former Congressman Howard Wolpe (D-Lansing) reportedly is edging his hat closer to the **gubernatorial election** ring. According to press reports, by early next week Wolpe will file forms permitting formation of an exploratory fundraising committee. If he does, the former Third District representative joins fellow early-bird state Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-Lansing), who already has established an exploratory committee for the 1994 race.
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