



Michigan ROUNDUP

March 4, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- Under the **shared power agreement** in the House, Democrats control committees and the floor during March. Republican chairs were thus eager to report out as many of their party's bills as possible last week. One that made it out of the Insurance Committee was HB 4156, a no-fault insurance reform measure that is expected to be considered by the full House next Tuesday.
- Pressing on with its pending **anticrime measures**, the Senate passed nine more bills in Gov. John Engler's legislative package last week. Included were bills giving prosecutors authority to compel witnesses to testify in certain crimes (SB 199), allowing crime lab technicians to testify via videotape at preliminary hearings (SBs 206, 207), permitting convicted juvenile offenders to be considered for resentencing as adults when they reach age 21 (SBs 200, 201), and changing the state's definition of legal insanity, in part by removing mental illness and retardation from consideration as evidence of insanity (SB 202).
- With a keen eye on **curbing medical malpractice costs**, the Senate passed five bills that revise the state's medical licensing and disciplinary procedures and create an experimental risk management program for three medical specialties. SBs 333-336 passed handily, as did SB 343, which revises Michigan's procedures for disciplining physicians and requires the reporting of drug- and/or alcohol-impaired doctors.
- Two bills aimed at **giving taxpayers better explanations** of their legal alternatives and more hospitable treatment from the state Treasury Department passed the House and are now before the Senate. Dubbed the "taxpayers' bill of rights," HBs 4104 and 4160 would require explanatory brochures, polite letters, and prompt discharge of liens by the Treasury Department. The bills also would provide damage awards in cases of intentional or reckless disregard by the department of a tax law or procedure.
- The House completed action this week on a **teacher tenure reform** package begun last week with the passage of HB 4209. That measure, sent to the Senate last week, streamlines the disciplinary appeal process for tenured teachers. This week, the lower chamber approved HB 4112, doubling the length of probationary periods for both new and tenured teachers.

Political News

- First Lady Michelle Engler announced this week the **resumption of her legal career** by joining the firm of Varnum, Riddering, Schmidt, and Howlett on April 1. The Grand Rapids-based firm, ranked seventh largest in Michigan in a 1992 rating, employs more than 100 attorneys in several offices across the state, including Lansing. Engler, a bankruptcy lawyer and partner in a Houston firm at the time of her marriage to Michigan's governor in 1990, previously has eschewed practice in favor of volunteer work for literacy. Last year, she accepted a temporary job grading state bar examinations.
- The other half of the now two-career family, Gov. John Engler, leaves next week for an important **trade trip to Mexico**. More than 110 participants will join Engler for the largest-ever state delegation in an attempt to woo Mexican markets for state products in the course of a four-day visit.
- Only one **sobriety check roadblock** was ever set up in Michigan, in 1986, yet questions of the operation's legality have occupied state and federal courts ever since. The Michigan Supreme Court this week heard arguments about whether the roadblocks violate the state constitution's prohibition against unreasonable search and seizure. In 1990 the U.S. Supreme Court decreed that the practice did not violate the federal constitution. The state high court's ruling is not expected for several months.
- The Michigan Court of Appeals upheld this week the state's right to apply the **single business tax** both to out-of-state sales by Michigan firms and to in-state sales by out-of-state firms.
- Former state public health director Raj Weiner is said to favor her Michigan position with an antismoking coalition over recent **job offers from Washington**. According to the *Detroit News*, Weiner has cited the needs of her two young children in declining the positions of Health and Human Services Department inspector general and administrator of the department's \$300 billion health care funding.
- Language for a ballot initiative to **ban local ordinances** prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was approved last week by the Board of State Canvassers. A group called the Coalition of Family Values hopes to obtain the 256,457 signatures required to bring Michigan voters in 1994 the same constitutional amendment passed by Colorado in 1992.