

## Michigan ROUNDUP

March 12, 1992

### *Legislative Week in Review*

- A House-backed bill restoring funding for **indigent health care** faces a gubernatorial veto threat in partisan battling about how to address the current-year budget deficit. HB 5228, which would appropriate some \$67 million in federal and local funds for indigent care and prescription subsidies for the elderly, passed the House this week 91-0. The funds were approved by the legislature in December but in a form later ruled unconstitutional by the attorney general. Governor John Engler threatens to veto the measure unless it is linked with others that will help balance the budget.
- The Senate rejected House changes in SB 141, the "**informed consent**" abortion bill, sending to a joint conference committee the controversial measure that requires women to wait 24 hours before receiving an abortion. By a vote of 25-12, the Senate nixed House modifications to the bill that remove the requirement that women awaiting the procedure be shown pictures of fetuses and given a brochure detailing abortion risks.
- Under a bill passed 22-13 by the Senate this week, Michigan drivers flaunting the state **seat belt law** could expect lower damage awards if they are injured. SB 792 would permit juries to reduce damage awards by as much as they wish to people injured while not buckled up. Existing statutes permit damage award reductions of only 5 percent.
- A site for a state **Vietnam War memorial** was established in HB 5028, passed by the House 87-0 this week. The measure would specify a location farther west of the capitol complex than the site vetoed by the governor last session.
- A new standard of **corporal punishment** in Michigan schools becomes effective with the governor's signing of SB 338 into law as Public Act 6. The law now allows school personnel to use reasonable force to deal with students endangering their own or others' safety.

### *Political News*

- The landscape fairly bristles with candidates and commentators bracing for the St. Patrick's Day **presidential primaries** in Michigan and Illinois. At stake in this state are 72 Republican and 131 Democratic delegates. The Michigan Democratic race has been opened up some by the withdrawal last week of Iowa Senator Tom Harkin, Big Labor's favored candidate.
- The state's **financial estimates** sank lower this week, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency. The SFA enlarged its estimate of the current-year budget deficit to \$863 million while simultaneously reducing FY 1992-93 revenue growth projections by more than \$220 million.
- Governor Engler has unveiled the **health care agenda** promised in his State of the State address. Titled "Healthy Michigan," his proposals would toughen medical malpractice liability, add new health promotion programs, cap state-mandated health care benefits, and clamp sweeping restrictions on tobacco use. If the governor's plan is adopted by the legislature, Michigan would be the first state to ban smoking on state property and the second to outlaw cigarette vending machines. Michigan has the highest chronic disease rate of all the states and is tied with Kentucky for the highest smoking rate.
- A U.S. Supreme Court decision could cost Michigan automakers more than \$35 million in **workers' compensation** repayments. Based on a 1987 state high court ruling, Ford Motor Company and General Motors reduced their disability payments to workers injured before 1982, but the move subsequently was repudiated by the legislature as an overzealous application of the court decision. The automakers challenged this position and lost; the unanimous Supreme Court decision was written by Justice Sandra O'Connor and released this week.
- Testimony before the three-judge federal panel charged with **congressional redistricting** began Monday and is expected to last all week. Michigan will lose two congressional seats, and Democrats have proposed that each party should sacrifice one by pairing off two incumbents. Republicans counter that Democrats currently hold an 11-7 partisan majority of the delegation's seats, and they propose a plan that pairs off only Democratic incumbents in two separate districts.

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