



Michigan ROUNDUP

March 19, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- Bay City Republican Joel Gurgeon won a spirited race in the 34th Senate District this week to swell the **GOP caucus** in the upper chamber to 22 members—the largest it has been in the past two decades. Partisan pols now have their sights riveted on the 66th House District seat vacated by newly elected Sen. Philip Hoffman (R-Horton), who won the 19th Senate District.
- The contest for the new **House vacancy** will determine if the current shared power arrangement continues, or if Democrats regain majority control. Jackson County Treasurer Janet Rochefort—who became the first Democrat in 40 years to win a countywide election in the heavily Republican district when she assumed her current post—is considered a formidable candidate. However, a potentially formidable opponent appeared on the scene this week, with Jackson Community College President Clyde LeTarte announcing his Republican bid for the seat. A political newcomer who will take a leave of absence from his campus, LeTarte is said to have been wooed to candidacy by the entire state Republican hierarchy, starting with Gov. John Engler.
- With details of Governor Engler's **1994 recommended budget** due for Friday release, several major policy initiatives have been floated in recent days, including the following:
 - A \$51 million "Healthy Kids" program giving *comprehensive medical benefits* to children under age 16 whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to afford private insurance.
 - A 14 percent increase in *prison spending*, with funds earmarked for more prison capacity, a new psychiatric prison, more state police and regional police posts, and a new police telecommunication system.
 - A new program *marketing Michigan to business*. The \$2 million initiative would court corporations both nationally and overseas.
 - A major change in *school funding* that would transfer social security and retirement monies to the membership formula and guarantee \$4,200 per pupil for districts levying the average school millage rate (34.5 mills).
- An executive order signed by the governor this week elevates the director of the state's **Office of the Great Lakes** to cabinet level. At the same time, a report issued by a coalition of environmental groups, the Michigan Environmental Council, takes the Engler administration sharply to task, contending it has promulgated anti-environmental policies.
- Michigan State University's **presidential search** continues to navigate a difficult course between the trustees' desire for candidate confidentiality and the state's Open Meetings Act. MSU trustees—all eight of whom serve on the school's search panel—considered and rejected this week a strategy in which half of them would have resigned from the presidential selection committee, enabling that group to meet in private under existing statutes. MSU-backed legislation exempting universities from the Open Meetings Act for presidential searches foundered last session, and there is currently no viable means for a quorum of the board to vote privately on a list of finalists for the institutional presidency.
- The Engler administration announced plans this week to **consolidate computer systems** throughout much of state government. Fourteen departmental computer centers and 19 telecommunications networks will be consolidated, according to a *Detroit News* report suggesting that private contractors will likely take over ownership and operation of significant portions of the state's system, which has an estimated current annual operating cost of \$320 million annual.

Political News

- The "Taxpayers Bill of Rights" that passed the House last week sailed unanimously through the Senate this week and was returned to the lower chamber for concurrence with amendments. HBs 4104 and 4160 require the Department of Treasury to publish explicit explanations of taxpayers' rights to procedural protection, appeal, and complaint filing. The department also is required to promulgate rules for employee conduct toward the public.
- School buildings would be subject to the same **construction and inspection codes** as other major public buildings under a House bill passed this week. HB 4143 closes a loophole under which school construction projects are exempt from certain state Department of Labor construction codes.
- The House has released a tentative **session schedule** for the remainder of the year that assumes final passage of a state budget in late June, with session resuming on September 20. The last session day of 1993 is currently set for December 16. As earlier announced, spring recess in the lower chamber is scheduled from April 6 to 19.

