



Michigan ROUNDUP

Legislative Week in Review

- Proposals and counter-proposals were swapped in this week's 1991 **budget negotiations** in the legislature, but no agreement is in sight between Senate Republicans, led by Majority Leader Dick Posthumus (R-Alto), and House Democrats, represented by Speaker Lewis Dodak (D-Birch Run). Key remaining differences between the two sides are the depth of cuts in social services programs and the extent of one-time borrowing from the budget stabilization ("rainy day") fund.
- A resolution authorizing expenses up to \$16.5 million to enable the state's compliance with a **federal consent decree** for programs at three Michigan prisons passed the House 58-36 and was sent to the Senate this week. HCR 82 would fund mandated improvements in medical care, legal access, and overcrowding. Another provision of the 1984 agreement required Michigan to site, fund, and begin construction of a new psychiatric hospital for inmates by January 1, 1990. The fine for the state's failure to do so imposed by U.S. District Court Judge Richard Enslen was hiked last week to \$10,000 daily.
- The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) would be resuscitated under HB 4484, which **rejects the executive order** calling for its elimination. Governor Engler's order would shut down the agency effective April 1, leaving the federal government to pick up MIOSHA's occupational protection functions, which affect about 15 percent of the state's work force. The House bill salvages the agency in part by raising penalties imposed under the act to generate an additional \$10-14 million. If the measure is not passed by the Senate and enacted, the earlier executive order will stand.
- A Senate bill banning **assisted suicides** passed the chamber 26-8 this week and now faces tough opposition in the House, where Judiciary Committee chair Rep. Perry Bullard (D-Ann Arbor) has expressed opposition to such bans. The Senate measure would make assisting a suicide a felony punishable by up to four years in prison and \$2,000 in fines.
- Republican U.S. Representative Carl Pursell has reintroduced legislation repealing the federal law permitting **newspaper joint operating agreements (JOAs)**. Michigan Democratic Representative William Ford is a cosponsor of the bill, which would not affect existing JOAs, such as the one linking the *Detroit News* and *Free Press*. Pursell opposed the 1989 merger of those two newspapers and proposed repealing the enabling statute last year; his bill was not reported out of committee.

Political News

- Saying that the state should end **welfare grant** increases that reward families for having more children, Governor Engler described new proposals for state aid cuts in an interview this week in the *Detroit Free Press*. The governor said he is considering standardized welfare grants to families with children to replace the current system, which evaluates individuals' living costs and income. He also proposes requiring unwed teenage mothers to live with parents or guardians as a condition of receiving welfare grants. Engler criticized media focus on the effects of social services cuts, adding: "I don't like to be called mean-spirited. I'm not. But in the end we'll be measured by our success. And we will be successful."
- Governor Engler's former chief of staff has been named head of the **Bureau of State Lottery**. Jerry Crandall, Engler's top aide from 1986-90, has served as acting head of the lottery since January.
- Former Senator William Sederburg has been appointed by the governor to the **Midwest Higher Education Commission**. During his legislative tenure Sederburg, now vice president for public policy at PSC, was instrumental in forming the commission, which he now chairs.
- The U.S. Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee held this week what it called the first hearing in congressional history to examine the **adversities confronting black men** in urban America. Committee chair Sen. Donald Riegle called attention to the increased violence dramatized in recent news accounts of the shooting death of a black veteran in Detroit and the clubbing of a black man by Los Angeles police. The committee was told that the number of black men in prison doubled in the 1980s, and today almost 25 percent of those in their 20s are incarcerated, on parole, or on probation—more than the number of black men of all ages attending college. Homicide is the leading cause of death for black males aged 15-19, the committee was told.
- Members of the state's County Road Association were told not to expect **gasoline tax increases** in the foreseeable future. Transportation Director Patrick Nowak told the group that neither he nor Governor Engler would support higher gas taxes, despite the association's wish to boost the tax, which funds maintenance of 88,000 miles of county roads in the state. An association spokesperson told the *Lansing State Journal* that county road problems, including resurfacing and snow removal, could reach crisis proportions in another year.
- Calling the language overly vague, the Isabella County Election Commission has rejected a proposed petition that would require a **recall election** of Governor Engler. Three other petitions seeking gubernatorial recall have been filed in the county this month and await commission review. If the petition language is approved, slightly more than 641,000 voter signatures would need to be collected in a 90-day period.