



Michigan ROUNDUP

....Senate Republicans Wednesday passed a six-bill package of workers' compensation reforms. The changes include revising the legal definition of disability; allowing insurers to coordinate workers' compensation benefits with other benefits (i.e., social security, pensions, and other employer-paid benefits) for workers injured before March 31, 1982; limiting disabled workers' ability to sue employers for damages; privatizing the Accident Fund of Michigan; and allowing employers to set up their own workers' compensation systems. Democrats charged that the bills do not adequately protect workers and are too pro-business. The issue promises to result in a battle between the House and Senate, with final action expected before May 15, the date the current definitions of disability expire.

....Support is growing for legislation to withdraw state pension funds from companies doing business in South Africa. Last session, such legislation passed the House but died in a Senate committee. This year, Republican Senator Dan DeGrow has agreed to co-sponsor the legislation, a move that observers claim could help win Senate passage.

....House Speaker Owen and Senate Majority Leader Engler have ordered a review of the secretary of state's authority to seek more information on expenditures from officeholder expense fund (OEF) accounts. Austin notified 75 current and former state officials last week that more details were needed on their OEF accounts to make sure the funds had not been used for personal benefit. Several public officials have criticized Austin's inquiry, claiming it is tarnishing the image of officials who have done nothing wrong.

....The State Board of Education announced Thursday that Gary Hawks, the Department of Education's associate superintendent for post-secondary education, has been named interim state schools superintendent. Hawks, who is from Ypsilanti, served as vice president of university relations at Eastern Michigan University prior to joining the department in 1982. He is a 1958 graduate of Michigan State University. Hawks replaces Phillip Runkel, who is leaving the post May 1 to become president of Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City.

....DSS Director Patrick Babcock testified before a House committee this week that the decision to end or continue Medicaid funding for abortions should not be based on a narrow view of the costs. While the State paid about \$5.9 million for Medicaid abortions in 1986, Babcock stated that it costs 16 times as much as an abortion to provide prenatal, delivery, and postnatal care and child support during the first year of life. The key, he said, is to reduce unwanted pregnancies.

....Businessman Richard Chrysler, who is reportedly considering a run against incumbent Democratic U.S. Senator Don Riegle in 1988, said this week that he is also considering running for one of two state seats on the Republican National Committee. The latter would mean taking on outspoken Grand Rapids businessman Peter Secchia, who has been the national committeeman from Michigan for seven years. Secchia did not support Chrysler's candidacy for state Republican chair in 1983 or Chrysler's bid for the Republican nomination for governor in 1986.

....Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole announced that automakers have been granted an extension, from 1989 to 1993, in the deadline for installing front-seat passive restraints.