

Michigan ROUNDUP

April 30, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- After two days of intense debate, SB 270—**medical malpractice reform**—passed the House on a 72–29 vote. It is a matter of speculation whether the upper chamber will concur in the House's version of measures to cut medical costs by capping damage awards or send the bill to conference committee. Hailed by supporters as the first broad tort reform measure in seven years to gain passage, the bill would require patients to give six months' notice before suing for malpractice, restrict who can offer expert testimony in malpractice trials, and cap most pain and suffering awards at \$250,000 (the cap would be raised to \$500,000 in cases resulting in brain and spinal injury, infertility, or mental impairment). A coalition of health care groups supported the House version of the bill; among those opposing the measure were patient rights groups and trial lawyers. Nineteen Democrats joined 53 Republicans to pass the measure; all 29 opposing votes were cast by Democrats.
- This is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, and an eight-bill **victims' rights** package sailed through the Senate with no opposition. The main bill, SB 137, would require (1) convicted criminals to make restitution to victims (current law leaves restitution to the discretion of the court), (2) prosecutors to hear from victims before approving plea bargains, and (3) prosecutors to notify victims of the results of an appeal within 24 hours. Another bill in the package, SB 474, would extend the deadline for filing claims with the Crime Victims Compensation Board and broaden the range of expenses (such as for child care and housekeeping) that may be claimed.
- A bill banning so-called **revolving door lobbyists** easily passed the House on a 93–10 vote this week. House Bill 4396 would prohibit elected state officials who resign their office midterm from immediately accepting lobbying jobs; the measure would prohibit any lobbying during the remainder of an official's unexpired term. In addition, lobbying for pay would be banned for one year after the expiration of a term.
- Beginning October 1, independent accounting firms will conduct **biennial legislative audits**, with operational audits scheduled at least every four years. Governor John Engler signed into law Public Act 33 of 1993 (HB 4185), which is intended to foreclose the possibility of another legislative fiscal agency brouhaha.

Political News

- First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is the **commencement speaker** at the University of Michigan's graduation exercises this weekend. She will receive an honorary degree.
- Congressman John Conyers (D-Detroit) made headlines with his heated exchange on Wednesday with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno. Conyers called the government's handling of the **Waco, Texas, armed standoff** a profound disgrace and suggested that Reno had rationalized the loss of children's lives there. Reno vehemently disagreed and added, I will not engage in recrimination.
- Veteran educator and school millage expert Phillip Runkel will head the campaign promoting passage of **ballot Proposal A**, the school finance and property tax reform measure, in the June 2 special state election. Runkel, a former state superintendent of public instruction, also was superintendent of two of the state's largest school districts and is credited with the successful passage of seven school millage proposals during his tenure. In related news, the proposal was endorsed this week by the Michigan Education Association (MEA), the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce. The MEA's support has been considered crucial by Proposal A backers.
- House Democratic Speaker Curtis Hertel (Detroit) made several **committee reassignments** this week. Representative Ted Wallace (Detroit) will replace the late Joe Young, Sr., on the Appropriations Committee. Representative David Points (Detroit) will replace Wallace on the Taxation Committee, and Rep. Karen Willard (Fair Haven) will take Wallace's place on the Judiciary Committee.
- Governor Engler agreed this week to meet with representatives of state Indian tribes to revive stalled **reservation gambling** talks. All seven federally recognized Michigan tribes operate gaming operations on their reservations, most of which are located in the Upper Peninsula.
- Meeting in Dearborn for a **welfare reform** conference sponsored by the National Governors' Association, Governor Engler declared his sweeping welfare changes a success, pointing to 9,000 former welfare recipients who have obtained jobs. He noted that his five-year welfare reform plan will be evaluated formally by a private sector reviewer.