



Michigan ROUNDUP

May 6, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- A lopsided House vote scrapping the **state inheritance tax** could save citizens \$70 million next year. The October 1 effective date of HB 4597, however, forces the question of how the state will make up the lost revenue. Gov. John Engler and Senate Republicans have pushed hard for repeal of the state's so-called death tax, but with an effective date of 1996, leaving several years to figure out how to fill the resulting budget gap. The 94-6 House vote reverses a decade of opposition in the lower chamber and, says the *Detroit News*, puts Governor Engler in a political hot seat by making the repeal effective this year. Engler "is not a person who flinches very quickly when people try to play political games," warns administration spokesman John Truscott, who added that if the bill passes the Senate and is signed by the governor, "we'll just have to cut more out of next year's budget."
- With bipartisan support, the Senate approved the 1993-94 **K-12 school aid budget**, predicated on passage of the June 2 ballot Proposal A. HB 4464 includes \$5.8 billion and was returned to the House for final action on a 35-2 vote. The school aid budget is 65 percent larger than the current year's appropriation, reflecting the increased state support and reduced local contribution that would result if Proposal A is adopted.
- Other spending bills in the upper chamber eked out party-line majorities, reflecting Democratic distaste with the **biennial budget** format of Governor Engler's recommendations. The 16 Senate Democrats, joined by Sen. Fred Dillingham (R-Fowlerville), tried to convert the Department of Agriculture budget (SB 522) into a single-year authorization but were repelled by the block vote of the chamber's remaining 21 Republicans. By partisan votes, budgets for the Department of Natural Resources (SB 530) and general government (SB 527) were also passed and sent to the lower chamber.
- Opinion remains sufficiently divided in both chambers over the merits of two controversial reform measures to forestall their receiving **immediate effect** votes this week. The House version of SB 270, the medical malpractice reform package, failed for a second time to gain the necessary two-thirds majority for immediate effect, meaning that the bill's provisions would not become effective for a year, assuming that the House version is adopted by the Senate. Meanwhile in the upper chamber, members continue to seek the requisite votes to add immediate effect to auto insurance reform—in the form of HB 4156—which has won Senate and House approval. Lacking immediate effect, the provisions would not become effective until August 1994, during which hiatus opponents are threatening to launch a ballot petition drive to undo the legislation.
- Coming as a chaser to last weekend's liquor price hikes is a House bill prohibiting **liquor control commissioners** from accepting related private sector employment for six months after leaving office. HB 4332 seeks to apply to the five member Board of Commissioners comparable "revolving door" restrictions being proposed for other elected officials.

Political News

- Detroit newspaper columnist George Weeks reports that the latest rumored presidential appointment for **former Gov. Jim Blanchard** is U.S. Ambassador to Canada. Beyond conjecture is former Michigan first lady Paula Blanchard's acceptance of the vice-presidency of the National Fund for the United States Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C.
- The Board of State Canvassers approved language this week for a constitutional amendment petition to abolish the **State Officers Compensation Commission**. Former Rep. Stephen Dresch is leading a movement to require legislators to take direct action to increase elected officials' pay, with the raises kicking in after their next election. Under the current system, proposed pay levels set by the compensation commission automatically take effect unless rejected by both legislative chambers. Dresch hopes to collect the required 256,457 signatures to place the issue on the November 1994 ballot.
- Michigan State University's **presidential search** process is challenged in a suit filed this week by the *Lansing State Journal* and the *Detroit News* charging that the school's screening committee is violating the state's Open Meetings Act by cutting the candidate list in private session.
- The Latest House Democratic **committee assignment** changes have John Freeman (Madison Heights) named co-chair of the Corrections Committee and Kirk Profit (Ypsilanti) serving as vice co-chair of the Judiciary Committee. Howard Wetters (Kawkawlin) will serve on the Business and Finance Committee, and David Points (Detroit) has been named to the Taxation Committee.