



Michigan **ROUNDUP**

Legislative Week in Review

- House Majority Leader Lewis Dodak (D-Birch Run) predicted a long hot summer of fiscal contention following the Tuesday **breakdown of budget talks** with the Senate leadership and Governor John Engler over the \$900 million current year deficit. Both sides previously had agreed on many components of a compromise and had been predicting final resolution of the current year spending package for the past several weeks. Negotiations fizzled, however, when compromise could not be reached on funding levels for such Department of Social Services (DSS) programs as Job Start, general assistance, and emergency needs. Dodak characterized the stalemate as a “power play” in which the Republican administration seeks to use a budget crisis to reshape long-standing social policy. For their part, Republicans chastised the Democratic-controlled House for what they called an irresponsible unwillingness to compromise on DSS spending levels.
- In action underscoring the continuing budget quagmire, Senate Democrats succeeded in **withholding immediate effect** from three House-initiated one-shot revenue enhancement bills aimed at eliminating a major portion of the FY 1990–91 deficit. The bills authorize borrowing from the Budget Stabilization (“rainy day”) Fund, provide for the early repayment of school bond funds, and permit a one-time accounting change in the state’s treatment of property tax credits. The delaying effect—under which the bills will not become law until next April—renders the legislation useless in addressing the current shortfall. Senate Democrats said they did not wish to increase the governor’s ability to resolve disputed budget issues without negotiation.
- Faced with these standoffs, Governor Engler proposes to secure an internal fund transfer by action of the **State Administrative Board** that would restore funding to adoption, foster care, and long-term care programs. The “Ad Board,” which was created in 1921, meets regularly to approve transfers within appropriations for particular departments or other entities of state government. Six state officers sit on the board: the governor, lieutenant governor, treasurer, attorney general, secretary of state, and superintendent of public instruction. Politically, the board—scheduled to meet today—has a 4-2 Republican majority. Engler also proposes redirecting some \$46 million in DSS funds by eliminating general assistance payments as of June 1 to adults deemed able-bodied. Dodak contends that such actions illegally bypass the legislative process, and if the board approves the transfers, he vows to contest them in court.
- The House will receive two **schools of choice** bills approved Wednesday by the Senate. SB 158 requires all multiple-school districts to implement a parental choice plan by the 1992–93 academic year. SB 159 provides funding for six intermediate district pilot programs.
- On a 62–40 vote—split almost on party lines—the House passed HB 4748 prohibiting the insertion of **political or legislative commentary** into state workers’ pay envelopes. The issue arose when Governor Engler used paychecks as a dissemination point for letters describing spending cuts. Republican members of the House Oversight Committee, which unanimously reported out the bill, joined Democrats on the floor vote supporting the measure.
- In what has been heralded as an historic break with the National Rifle Association, legislation requiring a seven-day **waiting period for handgun purchases** passed the U.S. House of Representatives Wednesday. The 239–186 vote on the so-called Brady Bill had support from 12 of Michigan’s 18 representatives. Leading the state delegation’s opposition was Congressman John Dingell (D-Trenton), who has said that the bill simply will not work as a deterrent to gun-related crime; he was one of the bill’s chief opponents. Fellow Democrats Bob Carr (East Lansing) and Bob Traxler (Bay City) also opposed the bill, as did Republicans Dave Camp (Midland), Bob Davis (Gaylord), and Guy Vander Jagt (Luther).

Political News

- The citizen petition drive to **cut property taxes** by 20 percent (a 10 percent rollback in each of two years) died in a deadlock Wednesday. The Board of State Canvassers, which had been reviewing the validity of petition signatures for several months, finally settled the issue with a 2–2 vote on whether to certify the document; by law, the tie has the effect of defeating the measure. Petition leader Richard Headlee objected to what he called partisan maneuvering and says he will seek court action to overrule the board and place the proposal before the legislature and the voters. State elections analysts said the petition was 7,300 signatures short of the required minimum of 191,726. If certified, the proposal would have required legislative action within 40 days. If rejected by the legislature, the measure automatically would have gone before voters on the 1992 ballot.
- Speaking last week in Ann Arbor, Governor Engler predicted that state **funding for the arts** will be reduced next year beyond this year’s 9.2 percent cut. Engler told the *Detroit News* that he wants to “zero out” arts grants, but that total elimination will probably not be possible in 1992.

