



Michigan ROUNDUP

Legislative Week in Review

- Governor John Engler signed into law last week three bills intended to apply a **one-shot budget boost** of nearly \$750 million toward the current year deficit of roughly \$900 million. But because three of the bills—totalling about \$700 million—were not given immediate effect, it is not yet certain they can be applied to this budget year, which ends September 30. Executive and legislative branch representatives were meeting this week in an effort to resolve this piece of the sorely vexed budget negotiation process.
- Michigan's pinched cash flow could get permanent help from Senate bills passed Wednesday that would require **electronic transfer of tax payments** from the state's larger employers. SBs 236 and 237 could earn the treasury an extra \$8 million annually by mandating that employers withholding more than \$50,000 in monthly payroll tax deductions forward the payments to the state electronically rather than by mail.
- Legislative leaders are looking to **adjourn** by the end of June, dependent on the emergence of budget agreements that thus far have proved elusive. The House has set June 19 as the last day to refer budget bills to conference committee; the Senate hopes to leave on June 20 and return to wrap up one week later.
- A controversial **informed consent** bill approved by the Senate Wednesday would require a 24-hour waiting period for prospective abortion recipients following their being told of the procedure's potential physical and psychological side effects and shown photographs of a fetus. Physicians who fail to provide information and photographs could face delicensure or fines. Viewed by critics as an anti-abortion measure, SB 141 was described by the *Detroit Free Press* as the first anti-abortion bill likely to be passed by both chambers and signed into law by the governor since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision guaranteeing access to abortion. The 1988 ban on Medicaid-funded abortions and the 1990 law requiring parental consent for teenagers' abortions both resulted from citizen petition drives that overrode earlier legislative and gubernatorial opposition.
- An eleven-member commission answerable to the legislature would determine **criminal sentencing guidelines** under HBs 4127 and 4130 passed Wednesday by the House. The bills charge the proposed commission with revising minimum sentences and intermediate sanctions for all crimes, based on the crime's severity and the criminal's record; the revisions would require legislative approval.

Political News

- Governor John Engler and Congressman Bob Davis (R-Gaylord) led a state delegation to Indianapolis Thursday to plead for **Wurtsmith Air Force Base**. The Oscoda facility, which is considered vital to the economy of northeast lower Michigan, is one of forty-three bases scheduled for closing due to U.S. Department of Defense budget cuts. Engler, Davis, and Oscoda-area civic leaders were given one hour to present their arguments to a federal commission.
- The current seesaw of Department of Social Services (DSS) program funding switched again last week when the Michigan Court of Appeals blocked **general assistance funding cuts** scheduled to affect up to 95,000 individuals next week. An appellate panel overturned the recent circuit court decision approving the governor's use of the State Administrative Board to authorize the general assistance and other program funding transfers without legislative involvement. The governor has petitioned for state supreme court review of the issue. Funding levels for many DSS programs remain up in the air as long as questions of the respective authority and prerogative of the legislative and executive branches are pending in the state courts.
- After reviewing recently enacted legislation creating a state psychiatric prison, a federal judge on Wednesday halted the **\$10,000-a-day fine** levied since March for Michigan's failure to improve its prison mental health system. U.S. District Judge Richard Enslin lifted an earlier contempt charge against the state and suspended fines he began imposing in October 1990, which now total approximately \$900,000. Enslin ordered \$100,000 of that total to be given to the Department of Corrections to begin work on the project, which includes turning over care of mentally ill inmates to the Department of Mental Health. According to Associated Press reports, the balance also may be returned to the state if Enslin is satisfied with compliance at a July hearing.
- State business leaders gave Governor Engler **an overall grade of "C"** for his performance to date. A *Detroit News* survey of 124 executives at public and private firms gave the governor his highest grades—B+ and B-, respectively—for his budget balancing efforts and general leadership. He received a C for his efforts to lower taxes and improve the state's business environment. For public and legislative relations, the poll gave him his lowest score: C-.