



Public Sector Reports

Michigan ROUNDUP

Legislative Week in Review

- A proposal to elevate the current Office of Children and Youth Services to an autonomous agency in 1991 and convert it to the **20th state department** in 1995 won Senate approval on the rebound Wednesday. The proposal had failed passage by one vote the previous day, before eking out a five-vote approval margin, 21-16, on reconsideration. The Associated Press predicts an uncertain future for the measure in the House despite earlier agreements among key backers of the proposal— Sen. Jack Welborn (R- Kalamazoo) and Rep. Teola Hunter (D-Detroit)— and Governor Blanchard.
- Earlier this week, the Senate passed legislation keeping the **Accident Fund** of Michigan a part of state government. The measure, passed 24-10, now goes to the House, which already has approved a related bill. The Accident Fund provides workers' compensation insurance for nearly one-quarter of all state employers and last year underwrote almost \$180 million in premiums for about 35,000 policyholders. Pending legislation also would create a workplace safety fund to provide benefits to injured employees of uninsured firms.
- FY 1990-91 state **budget bills** were sent to conference committees this week, where differences between the House and Senate versions will be worked out. Before conferees begin their negotiations, the reconciliation of the FY 1989-90 supplemental appropriations bill must be completed, with consensus on revised target spending levels for next year. The legislature still is planning to complete the budget process by June 14.
- On a 13-3 vote, the House Education Committee reported out a proposed constitutional amendment, HJR Q, providing equal opportunity for students in **public schools** and increasing the total amount of budgeted state aid for education to 52 percent. Education spending currently represents 44 percent of the state's \$7.3 billion budget. As a constitutional amendment, the proposal would require voter approval on a statewide ballot. Unlike several other pending education funding reform measures, HJR Q does not specify a funding formula or propose changes in taxes. Critics of the proposal are particularly concerned about the likelihood that such constitutional language will move responsibility for education financing issues out of the legislature and into the courts.

Political News

- In the race for the **U.S. Senate**, Detroit attorney Clark Durant's primary bid against 10th District U.S. Rep. Bill Schuette has hit a snag. State elections officials reported Wednesday that Durant's canvassers failed to gather the legal requirement of at least 100 signatures from voters in 20 different counties. Although Durant petition signatures far exceed the minimum quantity, they fall four counties short of meeting the distribution requirement. Attorney General Frank Kelley is expected to release an opinion on the matter in time for consideration next week by the Board of State Canvassers, which has the authority to determine candidate eligibility for Michigan ballots.
- The U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of a Detroit man convicted of cocaine possession and sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. Ronald Harmelin petitioned the high court's review on the grounds that **life imprisonment without possibility of parole** violates the U.S. constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Michigan courts refused to hear an appeal of the sentence, which was imposed as part of the state's war on drug trafficking.
- Public relations executive Paula Blanchard's book, **'Til Politics Do Us Part**, will be released in July, and at least one state newspaper will publish excerpts before the August primary elections. The *Lansing State Journal* announced this week its plan to serialize parts of the book, which discusses the Blanchards' 21-year marriage and the strain of public service on private life.
- Michigan is one of five midwestern states eligible for a **pilot IRS program** that will permit electronic filing of balance due federal tax returns next year. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the IRS is enthusiastic about the processing advantages of the new system. If the program works well at the Cincinnati regional center, it will be made national in 1992. Other states participating in the trial are West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.
- Assistant Attorney General Gay Secor Hardy has been appointed Michigan **solicitor general**, the official responsible for representing the state's interest when civil and criminal cases are appealed to higher courts. Hardy, a member of the attorney general's staff since 1956, is the first woman to hold the post. She replaces Louis Caruso, who retired earlier this year.



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