

Michigan ROUNDUP



Legislative Week in Review

- Although the legislature and the Blanchard administration are close to resolving their differences on how much revenue will be available for state spending in FY 1989-90, how that money is to be spent remains undecided. Senate and House leaders met this week to negotiate new **1989-90 budget targets**, a process that traditionally precedes conference committee deliberations, but little progress was made. House Democrats and state budget director Shelby Solomon, who last week agreed on revised targets, blame Senate Majority Leader John Engler for the holdup, charging that he is trying to create financial problems for the state to his political advantage. (Engler is expected to challenge Governor Blanchard in 1990.) Engler has not agreed to new targets because he has not received a commitment to spend \$160-200 million more on K-12 education than recommended by the governor, which Solomon maintains the state cannot afford. Engler says that progress has been slowed due to the administration's lack of control over the budget process. He is particularly concerned about additional spending needs of the Department of Social Services for the current fiscal year. The legislature will not meet next week but will return the week of July 10. Until an agreement is reached, House Speaker Lewis Dodak (D-Birch Run) says the House will hold committee meetings and regular sessions at least three times a week during the summer; the Senate intends to hold session at least once every two weeks.
- A **supplemental appropriations bill** that includes additional funding for social services, public health, mental health, corrections, and treasury for the current fiscal year is tied up in conference committee pending agreement on next year's spending plan. The House and Department of Management and Budget say an additional \$163 million in social services spending for FY 1988-89 is necessary to pay for increased energy assistance needs and other programs as well as the costs of a higher than expected caseload. If the stalemate on the FY 1989-90 budget continues and the supplemental is not approved, the state will have difficulty meeting payment obligations to social service recipients and providers beginning in August, and significant reductions in programs would be required. To pressure the Senate to act on the supplemental, the House reconsidered its previous vote and approved a substitute version that contains \$267.4 million in general fund money; the substitute now goes to the Senate for either concurrence or rejection.

Political News

- Michigan State University professor Zoltan Ferency announced his plans to run for the **24th district Michigan Senate seat** in 1990, the post currently held by Senator William Sederburg (R-East Lansing). The *Detroit Free Press* quoted Ferency: "I can't tell you how devastated I was about the political climate in this country in the last presidential election. How people can throw the 'L' word at somebody and that person runs and hides from it." Representative Debbie Stabenow (D-Lansing), who is considering running for that seat, said that Ferency's candidacy would add interest to the election.
- The Michigan Department of Education reports the public is willing to support an increase in the sales tax for K-12 education. Two polls conducted by the department indicated, respectively, 60 percent and 61 percent support. Superintendent Donald Bemis said these results do not assure passage of a ballot proposal since attitudes could change quickly. The polls also surveyed opinion on other issues: 67 percent favor parental choice of schools, 96 percent support education about AIDS, and 85 percent believe a child with AIDS should be allowed to attend school if well enough to do so.
- Rep. **Dennis Dutko** (D-Warren) withdrew his resignation from the legislature Thursday while he challenges the length of his jail sentence. Dutko's resignation was to take effect July 1. House Speaker Lewis Dodak expressed deep disappointment with Dutko's decision. He and other members of the House Democratic caucus met Thursday and approved the following response: Ask Dutko to resign immediately, urge the judges involved in the case to release him to a full-time substance abuse treatment clinic, where he would serve the rest of his sentence, and in any event remove him from all of his committee assignments.
- Grand Rapids Republican Peter Secchia has been confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Italy. According to the *Grand Rapids Press*, Italy's ambassador to the United States, Rinaldo Petrignani, said that negative media attention is "water over the dam. It is clear that the President of the United States, by choosing Secchia, chose a person he thought would be just right as ambassador of the United States."
- Federal authorities are expanding their probe of projects financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) into western and northern Michigan communities. Intense investigation of HUD fraud in Kalamazoo led to the conviction of five people—a contractor, an investor, and three real estate agents. Sentences ranged from community treatment to a ten-year prison term.