

Michigan ROUNDUP

July 2, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

■ Wrangling over the effective date of **auto insurance reform** turned into political hardball Thursday when the Republican majority deployed a complex string of parliamentary maneuvers that resulted in an outraged Democratic caucus leaving the chamber en masse. Only Democrat Don Koivisto (Ironwood) remained to watch all his GOP colleagues except David Honigman (West Bloomfield) vote to reconsider the Senate's earlier passage of HB 4156. That measure, which caps damage awards, rolls back auto insurance rates, and cuts premiums providing annual savings of about \$100 to average motorists, has been the target of a tug-of-war between Republicans, most of whom favor the bill and wish to provide immediate effect, and Democrats, most of whom oppose the damages caps and have steadfastly withheld the critical votes needed for immediate effect. Six separate Senate votes set the parliamentary stage for passage of the bill, with an amendment effectively blocking Democratic efforts to put the measure on the November 1994 ballot. In the lower chamber, lawmakers refused late Thursday to suspend House rules in order to consider the measure. HB 4156 remains a political football that the House will pick up once more when it returns to session July 7.

■ Partisan debate over the sale of the state-owned **Accident Fund** continued this week as the Senate passed the final bill (SB 345) in a package of legislation enabling the state to auction off the workers' compensation insurer to a private bidder. The upper chamber mustered a 21-14 majority to pass SB 345 and send it to join seven other related measures that have already been referred to the House, where they face an uncertain future. Under its shared leadership plan, Republicans will not control the lower chamber until August, and key Democrats are opposed to selling off what they deem an undervalued state asset. Supporters of the sale fear a Democratic stall to defer committee consideration of the legislation will cause potential private investors to lose interest.

■ The House passed a **Department of Transportation budget** this week totaling just under \$2.5 billion in federal and state restricted funds. The House version of SB 536 pares \$850,000 from the version passed earlier by the Senate and appropriates funding for only the next fiscal year.

■ A **medical malpractice reform** bill won approval of both chambers this week, after years of legislative contention largely between groups representing physicians and trial attorneys. SB 270 imposes strict limits on noneconomic damages in malpractice suits and was passed by the Senate 27-11. A reconciling version in the House passed unanimously, and Gov. John Engler—a consistent supporter of the bill's major provisions—is expected to sign it. The House declined to give the measure immediate effect; its provisions will not take effect until 1994. Legislative approval of related reform measures in physician licensure and discipline is also required before the new malpractice rules can become effective.

■ Both state chambers worked to clear their calendars for the **Fourth of July holiday**. The Senate will recess from July 2 to July 13. The House plans to return on July 7. The next edition of *Roundup* will be appear either on July 8 or 15, depending on legislative activity.

Political News

■ A fractious, high-stakes race in the **65th House District** yielded a reportedly annoyed electorate and a narrow 1,100-vote victory for Republican Clyde LeTarte. Some pundits said Democratic challenger Janet Rochefort's aggressively negative campaign ads backfired; others preferred the view that the 46 percent Democratic turnout in a solidly Republican district was an omen of GOP electoral trouble ahead. In Detroit's irrefutably Democratic 3rd District, Mary Lou Parks won an anticipated victory in the other special election this week. These results continue the even partisan split and resulting shared leadership arrangements in the House.

■ Eleven-term Democratic Rep. H. Lynn Jondahl announced his **gubernatorial candidacy** this week. The silver-haired ordained minister whose district includes East Lansing and Okemos becomes the third Ingham County Democrat to confirm a gubernatorial bid. State Sen. Debbie Stabenow (Lansing) and former U.S. Rep. Howard Wolpe earlier declared their aspirations; East Lansing attorney and former mayor Larry Owen is also thought to be considering the race.

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