

Michigan **ROUNDUP**

July 16, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

■ After several weeks of leadership meetings failed to find momentum for **property tax/school finance reform** proposals, legislators and Governor Engler agreed this week to assign the issue to a conference committee. Using SB 146 as a vehicle, House and Senate conferees will now attempt to generate consensus that has thus far eluded their leaders. Against this backdrop, school systems across the state have millage requests up for approval in local elections this summer, and educators statewide are urging the governor and legislators to affirm a school financing package in the wake of Ballot Proposal A's failure at the polls.

■ If last session's bugaboo was gridlock, the current gremlin may be languor as officials voice dismay at the **slow pace of state budget approval**. Observing that "we've got to create a sense of urgency on the budget," State Management and Budget Department Director Patricia Woodworth opined this week that "things are taking a lot longer than they should." House and Senate leaders have agreed to daily meetings to finalize FY 1993-94 spending targets.

In addition to the need to revamp the school aid budget, the Department of Social Services budget remains firmly lodged in the House Appropriations Committee, where it is hostage to a partisan fight to add language restricting the governor's ability to move funds between programs without legislative approval. A Democratic attempt to include similar restrictions as part of the Department of Agriculture budget language deadlocked that bill in committee this week as well.

■ Senate passage of SB 384 will make Michigan one of three states mandating a **pre-abortion waiting period** and requiring that women seeking the procedure be shown drawings of fetuses and information about abortion risks. Right to Life of Michigan, which championed the so-called informed consent bill through a controversial year-long public debate in the legislature, called the measure one of the toughest such laws in the country. Governor Engler has supported the measure, passed by the House last week, which is derided by its critics as medical harassment of women.

■ More "No Smoking" signs loom in Michigan's future as the House and Senate concurred in final amendments to SB 459 prohibiting **smoking in public schools**. If both chambers agree, teachers' lounges and custodial break rooms could be smoke-free when classes open this fall. In a related measure, HB 4457 would expand the no-smoking sections in restaurants. The bill passed the House 79-16 this week.

■ By a 66-32 vote, the House this week set a stiff double standard for **underage drinkers**. The blood-alcohol content (BAC) above which Michigan drivers are charged with drunk driving is now .10; under provisions of HB 4839, drivers under age 21 with a BAC above .02 percent could lose their license for three months, be fined, and be sentenced to community service. Experts say a single beer or shot of liquor would give most youths a BAC of .02 or more. Supporters note that the bill aims to enforce the state's drinking age requirements and to reduce alcohol-related automobile accidents. Opponents argue that all drivers should be held to a common BAC standard.

■ Residents whose names are listed in a central registry of **suspected child abusers** would have to be notified under a pair of bills passed by the House last week. HBs 4595 and 4596 would require the Department of Social Services to notify those listed as possible child abusers or neglecters to explain how individuals may request expungement of inaccurate or unproven listings and provide a hearing in disputed cases. The list currently contains more than 200,000 names, while three-quarters of the cases they represent have never been adjudicated, lawmakers were told.

Political News

■ A recent court of appeals ruling breathed new life into the state **Commission on Death and Dying**, which will hold its first meeting at the end of the month. The 22-member panel was created by the legislature as part of the same act that made assisted suicide a felony. The commission has 15 months to study the issue and make recommendations to lawmakers, who then have six months to act before the felony penalties expire. Inclusion of the study provision in the assisted suicide ban was part of what caused a circuit court judge to strike down the entire law as unconstitutional this spring. The Michigan Court of Appeals blocked that decision last month.

According to a new U.S. Department of Justice report, Michigan has the nation's sixth highest **rate of imprisonment**. The study shows that Michigan sentences an average of 414 prisoners per 100,000 residents, compared with a national average of 329 per 100,000. States with an incarceration rate higher than Michigan are Louisiana, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Nevada, and Arizona.