



Michigan ROUNDUP

July 26, 1991

Legislative Week in Review

- Despite earlier predictions that **FY 1991-92 budget targets** could be agreed on this week, House and Senate leaders have conceded that they are unlikely to reach agreement before August. Lawmakers agreed early this month on an overall budget of \$7.53 billion for the fiscal year beginning October 1, but they have not yet resolved differences about how to close an estimated \$0.6-\$1.3 billion gap between revenues and expenditures.
- An estimated 34,500 employees, including the governor, face a **four-day furlough** next month in a budget-trimming plan to save \$13 million in this year's overdrawn budget. August 15, 16, 19, and 20 have been designated as unpaid vacation days for most state employees. Exempted from the layoff are workers paid from sources other than the General Fund and those whose jobs maintain essential state services or produce state revenue. Social Services and Treasury employees, for example, will instead select four unpaid days off before the end of the current fiscal year. Budget Director Patti Woodworth told the *Detroit News* that most people will not notice the layoffs, adding, "the average citizen only uses state agencies maybe twice a year—when they get their driver's license or registration, and when they file their state income tax."
- After weeks of agonizing amidst newspaper publicity juxtaposing gold paint with welfare cuts, funding for the final phase of **state capitol restoration** was approved by the Joint Committee on Capitol Restoration. The joint legislative-executive branch committee allocated nearly \$13 million for project completion from previously authorized bond funds.

Political News

- **Governor John Engler** is moving quickly on his promise to visit all eighty-three Michigan counties—and his driver has the verbal speeding warnings to prove it. No tickets were issued when the gubernatorial Oldsmobile was pulled over on July 4 and 23, a fact that angered 87 percent of telephone respondents in an informal *Lansing State Journal* survey. Notwithstanding the flap, Engler completed his fifth and sixth county visits this week. The latest PSC *Public Opinion Monitor* poll showed the governor's overall public approval rating up slightly from April when the chief executive registered a 41 to 38 percent approval/disapproval rating; the late-June sample showed Engler's ratings rising to 49 to 46 percent approval/disapproval.
- As expected, the seven-state **Midwest Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Commission** voted yesterday to expel Michigan for failing to locate a regional disposal site within the state. Ohio and Michigan voted against expulsion, which was the final action in a months-long impasse over funding and site selection criteria. Compact members also voted to sue Michigan to recover site selection funds and for the state's alleged intransigence in failing to find a site that met Michigan's environmental criteria. Michigan will seek congressional revision of current federal laws requiring states to assume responsibility by 1993 for their own low-level radioactive waste.
- Two August 6 primaries will narrow the fields for **special House elections** in the 36th and 56th Districts. No Democrats filed for Gerald Law's seat, and three Republicans will vie in that race. Sen. Michael Bouchard's House seat has attracted six Republicans whose primary victor will oppose an uncontested Democratic candidate in the special general election on August 27. Meantime, no dates have yet been set for the scheduled special election to replace Republican Rep. Sidney Ouwinga, who died of cancer July 17.
- U.S. Rep. David Bonior's election to **House Majority Whip** elevates the Mt. Clemens Democrat to the chamber's number three leadership slot. Bonior says he will use his position to push for "tax breaks for working families." Michigan's U.S. House delegation also includes three committee chairs and is considered one of the country's most influential.
- The Michigan Supreme Court agreed Wednesday to hear a case on **Medicaid-funded abortions**. In February the state court of appeals overturned Michigan's ban on state-funded abortion, ruling that the state constitution's equal protection clause provides for such action. Right to Life of Michigan and the state Department of Social Services filed the supreme court appeal, which is being hailed by some as a crucial test case on constitutional rights to privacy as well as on abortion rights.
- In an action paralleling that of the National Black Caucus, the **Michigan Legislative Black Caucus** voted this week to oppose the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the U. S. Supreme Court, stating that they find his views to be "diametrically opposed to the beliefs of the people we represent."
- The State Court of Appeals this week reinstated Michigan's **presidential primary** law requiring prospective voters to indicate party preference. The appellate panel reversed a lower court's declaration that the 1988 statute was unconstitutional.
- Stating that he soon will unveil his reorganization plans for the **Department of Natural Resources**, the governor last week filled three longstanding vacancies on the Natural Resources Commission, the body responsible for selecting the department director. In his campaign, Gov. Engler was sharply critical of both the organization and the activities of the department. Appointed to the NRC were farmer Larry DeVuyst of Ithaca, corporate environmental affairs director Paul Eisele of Belleville, and lumberman David Holli of Ishpeming.