

Michigan ROUNDUP

September 24, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- Calling for a special joint legislative session on October 5, Gov. John Engler will then unveil his proposal to **revamp education and school finance**. At "education summits" around the state, experts and interest groups have stumped for a variety of finance and policy reforms. A combination of new levies, including a boost in the sales tax requiring voter approval, are among measures being considered to offset the \$6 billion in property tax revenues eliminated next July by legislative action.
- Against a steady tide of Democratic opposition, a package of bills okaying the **sale of the Accident Fund** eked out the 56-vote minimum required for passage following six hours of debate on Thursday. The Senate-originated bills (SBs 48-52, 346, and 568) now return to the upper chamber for final action. Concern for the fate of current employees of the state's largest workers' compensation insurer fueled much of the opposition to the action, along with Democratic complaints that Republicans were too eager to divest the state of an asset whose worth has not been adequately assessed. The GOP ultimately picked up three Democratic votes to provide the slender edge necessary for passage.
- Legislation limiting **gubernatorial campaign donations** passed the Senate Wednesday and was returned to the House with a key change. SB 595 now prohibits the use of out-of-state-contributions by candidates in seeking to qualify for state campaign matching funds. The bill, which started out with that restriction, was amended in the House to permit non-Michigan dollars to be counted toward state matching funds; the upper chamber reinserted the original restriction. One compromise that hasn't come unstuck delays the effective date of the changes until the 1998 campaign.
- After amusing headline writers for more than a year, a bill providing more equal access to **public restrooms** was signed into law last week. The so-called potty parity bill (HB 4120) will require additional toilets for women in new public assembly facilities such as sports arenas, libraries, transportation terminals, and restaurants beginning January 1994.
- A measure requiring **teenage unwed mothers** to live with their parents in order to collect welfare benefits was sent to conference committee on a unanimous Senate vote this week. SB 143 mandates that pregnant minors and unmarried minors with children reside with a parent or else have their aid directed to the parent on their behalf. The House approved the bill with changes that the Senate judged unacceptably broad.
- A 90-day misdemeanor penalty for **food stamp fraud** would be instituted for infractions of less than \$250 under HB 4985, passed unanimously this week in the lower chamber. This legislation lowers the threshold for fraud penalties from its former level of \$1,000.

Political News

- A federal grand jury has **handed down indictments** of former House Fiscal Agency director John Morberg and two other state employees. The three are charged with eleven counts of mail fraud, with each count carrying a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. The indictments are a result of the state and federal investigation of alleged fiscal malfeasance within the HFA.
- Former East Lansing mayor and Michigan State University trustee chairman Larry Owen announced his **gubernatorial candidacy** last week. A Lansing attorney and confidant of former Gov. James Blanchard, Owen and his wife gained attention for their successful fund-raising in the Clinton presidential campaign.
- Macomb County Commissioner John Hertel was named earlier this month by Governor Engler to direct the financially troubled **Michigan State Fair**. The choice of a prominent Democrat whose brother is the State House Co-Speaker raised GOP hackles. Gubernatorial spokesmen noted that Hertel, chair of the state exposition and fairgrounds advisory council, was the best qualified candidate. He replaces former state Rep. Richard Allen who retired after three years in the post.
- The Michigan Supreme Court has ruled that state police use of **sobriety checklanes** to nab drunk drivers violates the Michigan Constitution. The 5-2 decision contradicts and takes precedence over a 1990 U.S. Supreme Court decision finding that the checklanes did not violate the U.S. Constitution. The ruling overturned a state court of appeals decision on the matter. At the time, the Michigan high court declined to hear the case.
- Detroit Mayor Coleman Young this week endorsed Sharon McPhail in the **race to succeed him**, in a move calculated to push her ahead of current front-runner Dennis Archer.