

Michigan ROUNDUP

October 7, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

- Governor John Engler formally unveiled his **school finance reform plan** on Wednesday to a joint legislative session. In his polished address, the governor used a sawed-off shotgun as a visual aid and was interrupted 40 times by mostly partisan applause. Most of the details of the proposal already had been made public, including calls for schools of choice, charter schools, standardized per pupil grants, and individual student “bank accounts” with the state whereby unspent K–12 education grants could be amassed for credit toward post-secondary education costs. (A detailed summary of the plan’s provisions will be mailed to PSC subscribers.)
- **Implementing education finance reforms**—either the governor’s or alternatives—will require a strenuous legislative response. The House Education and Taxation Committee co-chairs have set an ambitious October meeting schedule to deal with the 15–20 bills expected to be introduced to accomplish reform. The governor’s proposals require that seven sections of the state constitution be amended, and he has suggested this be presented to the voters in a statewide election on February 8, 1994. Meeting that deadline will require legislative approval of the changes—which range from a two-cent sales tax increase to reorganization of the State Board of Education—by two-thirds majorities in each chamber no later than December 8, roughly 60 days.
- A package of 15 bills that would **streamline the judicial process** by allowing municipalities to decriminalize some ordinance violations unanimously passed the Senate on Tuesday. SBs 731–745 give local communities authority to ticket certain offenders rather than require court appearances. Governor Engler vetoed a version of this legislation passed last session. In an attempt to gain gubernatorial approval for the package, the new version exempts certain offenses—including animal cruelty, reckless use of firearms, and use of vaporous chemical substances—from local decriminalization.
- Under threat by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the House passed two bills this week requiring new **automobile emissions test programs** in three counties and modifying existing testing programs in three others. HBs 4165 and 5016 were passed by narrow margins in response to the federal ultimatum that \$500 million in federal transportation funds for Michigan would be blocked if the state’s auto emissions record does not improve.
- It was another bad week for smokers. While the governor proposed a hefty **tobacco tax increase** to help finance public education, the Senate passed bills to **outlaw smoking** in all day care centers. HBs 4689–90 would bar smoking in such facilities when children were present, even if the facilities are private residences. In institutional care settings, HBs 4687–88 ban smoking altogether.

Political News

- Citing financial difficulties from declining membership, the **Michigan Citizens Lobby**, a Lansing-based consumer advocacy group, ceased operations last week. The 20-year-old organization laid off its five full-time employees and closed shop after efforts failed to renegotiate a back tax payment schedule with the Internal Revenue Service.
- Executive orders are said to be underway to move **1,200 jobs in the state education department** to other state agencies. According to the *Lansing State Journal*, the affected employees (many of whom handle federally funded rehabilitation and disability claims) probably will continue to perform the same duties from their current office locations but report to other departments. Although it will shrink the size of the Department of Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction Robert Schiller said, “There’s nothing punitive connected to this . . . the governor is narrowing the focus of the department to specifically K–12 education.”
- In the wake of recent state court rulings on the secrecy of **university presidential searches**, Central Michigan University set a good example earlier this month by voting in public session to place interim president Leonard Plachta in the permanent slot.
- The state’s largest teacher’s union, the Michigan Teachers Association, announced this week that it plans to **sue the state Insurance Bureau** over alleged “police-state tactics” employed in the course of a state audit of the MEA’s health insurance activity. Charging that the records requested exceed the scope of a routine audit, MEA Executive Director Beverly Wolkow told *The Detroit News*, “We’re the target of a political vendetta.”

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