

## Michigan **ROUNDUP**

October 14, 1994

### *Legislative Week in Review*

- The first wave of bills to implement Gov. John Engler's **education reform plan** were delivered to legislative chambers this week as hearings began. More than two dozen measures have been introduced so far in the House and Senate, with more expected in the days ahead.
- The Senate created two **new standing committees** last week to oversee reform legislation in the upper chamber. The Education Reform Committee is co-chaired by Republican Sens. Dan Degrow (Port Huron) and Michael Bouchard (Birmingham), and the School Finance Reform Committee has as its co-chairs Republicans Harry Gast (St. Joseph) and Joanne Emmons (Big Rapids). The two panels held their first meeting jointly this week.
- A major **trucking deregulation bill** rolled easily through the Senate last week on a 33-2 vote, just one day after winning committee approval. Under the provisions of SB 581, trucking firms will be able to establish their own rates for so-called contract carriage (typically, moving merchandise for manufacturers), while rates will remain regulated for common carriage (typically, delivering goods to and for the general public). Despite its easy Senate passage, the bill may face substantive roadblocks in the House and the governor's office.
- Governor Engler signed into law the **FY 1993-94 state government budget**. Now Public Act 191, the measure provides funds to 13 state departments and agencies, including the judiciary. The appropriations included a \$2 million increase to help reduce case backlog in the state appeals court.
- Three Senate bills passed this week would reverse Michigan's much-heralded 1988 **South African divestiture laws**. Michigan's ban on investment as a sanction to protest apartheid policies was considered among the nation's toughest. House passage of SBs 791-793 is anticipated. The measures would permit investment of state pension funds in companies with interests in South Africa, deposits of state funds in banks with South African ties, and investment by public universities in companies with links to South Africa.
- The House this week passed two bills (HBs 4074 and 4075) permitting **driver's license suspension** for those convicted of drug offenses. However, the chamber has not yet passed the Senate version of the same legislation, SBs 221 and 222. According to Gongwer News Service, the House Judiciary Committee does not yet have the votes to get the Senate bills reported to the floor. The holdup reflects a dispute over the federal government's insistence that such legislation be passed before Michigan can receive \$15 million in federal transportation funds. Some lawmakers object to imposing this penalty for a crime that may have been totally unrelated to a motor vehicle.
- Taking a weapon or firearm from a police officer would become a more serious offense under HB 4150 passed this week by the House. The measure provides a penalty of **up to ten years imprisonment** and a \$5,000 fine for taking an officer's firearm; disarming an officer of any other type of weapon would be punishable by up to four years in prison and a \$2,500 fine.

### *Political News*

- Michigan students' rate of **illegal drug use** is much higher than the national average, Robert Peterson, director of the state Office of Drug Control Policy, said Tuesday. Releasing a survey conducted by his office, Peterson went on to allege that the high rates reflect misuse by state educators of federal funds for a state school curriculum called the Michigan Model for Comprehensive Health Education. Peterson has been a frequent and outspoken critic of the curriculum—which he contends is a misdirection of drug education funds—and the federal funds' distribution. In the past the funds went directly to the Department of Education rather than through his office.
- A new **business recruitment strategy** called Michigan First was unveiled this week. Billed as the first true public/private partnership in job development, the program will split with Michigan businesses the cost of recruiting out-of-state firms to locate here. Michigan Bell executive John Currie has been appointed by the governor to head the new program, which is organized as a nonprofit tax-exempt private corporation. Companies and foundations will be able to make tax-deductible contributions to the new entity.
- The state attorney general's office announced this week it was investigating whether the Detroit/Wayne County Community Mental Health Board **deliberately overbilled the state** some \$2.3 billion over a two-year period. Mental health board executives told the Associated Press that bookkeeping mistakes, rather than fraud, are responsible for the apparent discrepancies.