

Michigan ROUNDUP

October 21, 1993

Legislative Week in Review

■ Education and school finance **reform proposals** continue to engross lawmakers in thickets of committee meetings aimed at sending bills to the Senate and House by month's end. Governor Engler's controversial recommendations for replacing property tax financing with a variety of other levies, increasing schools' accountability and parents' choices, and restructuring the State Board of Education have drawn fairly steady criticism in committee hearings but without generating specific alternative options. Among the leading new items on the education reform front this week are the following:

Release of a House Democratic Task Force report listing a number of education reform goals without describing how concomitant finance reform would be achieved

Announcement by the Senate Fiscal Agency that its analysis shows the governor's school finance plan will cost \$115 million more than initially estimated

Restoration of revenue sharing to cities, a concession agreed to Wednesday in the Senate Select Committee on School Finance Reform. Governor Engler's agreement to drop the politically provocative proposed cuts totaling \$400 million should gain supporters in urban areas; counties and townships—which would not benefit from the move—decried the compromise as preferential treatment.

■ The governor's signature on a six-bill package this week paves the way for the **sale of the Accident Fund** when the new statutes become effective next spring. "With this legislation, the Accident Fund of Michigan will return to the private sector, where it belongs," the governor said about the effects of new Public Acts 195-201.

■ Among Senate bills passed this week was SB 506 requiring all **moped riders** to wear helmets. The measure would expand existing law requiring helmets on riders under age 19.

■ HB 4457, expanding the **nonsmoking sections** of large restaurants, won a 28-7 vote in the Senate after debate on whether the measure represented unreasonable legislative interference. Under the proposed law, restaurants seating 50 or more diners must reserve at least half their seats for nonsmokers. Smaller eateries may fill up to three-quarters of their capacity with smokers.

■ In another smoking ban, the House passed a **moratorium on school incinerators**. HB 4379 would prohibit incinerators at pre-schools, private, and public schools effective one year from the measure's passage.

Political News

■ Former U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell is the **latest declared candidate** for Michigan's open U.S. Senate seat. The Plymouth Republican was apparently lured from congressional retirement by the prospect of bringing his relatively high name recognition into a race without an incumbent, following the surprise departure announcement of U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle.

■ Pressure from veteran's groups has canceled state plans for a **Vietnam trade mission** next month. While the governor never planned to attend personally, according to a *Detroit News* report, complaints from state Vietnam war veterans' organizations and the Michigan POW Committee persuaded Engler to cancel the state Commerce Department's planned itinerary to research business prospects. Meantime, five Michigan-based companies—including Ford and Amway—may make the prospecting trip on their own.

■ Former six-term state Rep. John Strand has been named chair of the **Public Service Commission**. The gubernatorial appointment, which requires Senate confirmation, is effective November 1. Strand has been a member of the state Tax Tribunal since his upset loss last November to Karen Willard in the 82d District.

■ The Senate **dissolved a standing committee** this week in a move reflecting the urgent priority it attaches to school reform issues. The Mental Health, Human Resources, and Senior Citizens Committee exists no more. Its chair, Sen. Joanne Emmons (R-Big Rapids) is leading the Senate's Select Committee on School Finance Reform. The committee's former areas of oversight will be divided up, with two additional standing committees getting retitled to reflect the changes. The Health Policy Committee is now called Health Policy, and Senior Citizens Committee. The Family Law, Criminal Law, and Corrections Committee is retitled Family Law, Mental Health, and Corrections.

■ *PSC is moving its offices next week and Michigan Roundup will not be published on October 28. Regular publication will resume on November 4.*