



Michigan ROUNDUP

October 24, 1991

Legislative Week in Review

- “An ugly **political sideshow** with no end in sight,” is how the *Lansing State Journal* sums up the two weeks of partisan name-calling in the legislature following Governor John Engler’s vetoes of \$129 million in the current year budget. This week brought the following incidents:
 - A soundtrack of squealing, **grunting pigs** on state Republican Party-sponsored radio ads that accused Democrats of supporting pork, waste, and fat in state services.
 - A failed attempt by Senate Democrats to discharge from committee a **supplemental appropriations** bill. Senate Republicans and maverick Democrat Gilbert DiNello (East Detroit) mustered a 21–17 majority to prevent HB 4605, a measure funding nearly \$275 million in House-backed additions to the Department of Social Services budget, from being removed from the Senate Appropriations Committee for debate on the full Senate floor.
 - A petition filed with the state **court of appeals** by Senate Majority Leader Dick Posthumus (R-Alto) and House Minority Leader Paul Hillegonds (R-Holland) asking that a circuit court ruling on general assistance welfare be overturned and that the judge in the case be barred from making similar future rulings. Sen. DiNello joined the petition, which contends that the ruling violates the state constitution’s separation of powers provision.
- After lengthy debate over broadening **optometrists’ scope of practice**, the yeas outweighed the nays 82–22 in the House this week on HB 4407. The measure permits optometrists to prescribe from an authorized list of diagnostic and therapeutic medications and is opposed by those who argue that optometrists lack the medical training of ophthalmologists or other physicians.
- A 29-bill package aimed at improving **health insurance affordability** advanced in the Senate this week, with supporters predicting its passage in full by the Republican-ruled chamber next week. The package would cost the state an estimated \$79 million in tax cuts and credits; Democratic critics say the plan is still priced beyond the reach of uninsured individuals and families most in need of its provisions.
- Michigan’s **prison towns** could receive additional revenue-sharing funds totaling \$1.8 million under a bill passed 29–8 by the Senate this week. Communities with correctional facilities would benefit from a change in the way inmate populations are counted under SB 251, in a move to compensate these municipalities for the additional administrative and court costs from inmate cases.
- Two measures making teenagers’ access to **driver education** courses contingent on academic performance passed the House this week. Current state law only requires a student to be at least 15 years old and physically able to operate a motor vehicle. Under the provisions of HBs 4499 and 4402, private and public school boards could set minimum academic standards—as is widely done for sports participation—for admission to school driver education programs.

Political News

- The board of the **Michigan Education Trust** announced this week that it may approve alternatives to the current college savings contract program, including a special high interest savings account administered by the state or a program to sell tax-free state environmental bonds. Unlike MET contracts, these savings plans could be used for purposes other than tuition. The board is expected to decide on these or other options at its December meeting.
- Political Action Committees (PACs) contribute the lion’s share of Michigan legislators’ **campaign funds**, according to a study released this week by Common Cause. In 1990 races, state senators received an average of 54 percent of their campaign contributions from PACs; House members received 66 percent of their total campaign funds from PACs. Common Cause called for a cap on PAC donations as well as on total contributions, noting that PACs contributed an average of almost \$89,000 for each senator and nearly \$31,500 for each representative in the most recent races.
- U.S. Ambassador to Italy and Grand Rapids resident Peter Secchia has been named honorary chairman of Michigan’s **Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee** Commission by Governor John Engler. Prominent Detroit Republican Frank Stella, chairman of the National Italian-American Foundation, will chair the commission; State Sen. Gilbert DiNello has been named vice-chair. A gubernatorial executive order charges the group with establishing appropriate Michigan observances of the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s voyages.
- In a letter to television network officials made public this week, U. S. Sen. Carl Levin lambasted **violent commercials** that are aired during children’s and family shows. “These acts of violence are particularly offensive because they are presented in a way—through 30-second commercials—that seriously limits a parent’s ability to prevent young children from being exposed to them,” Levin told the *Detroit Free Press*.

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