

Michigan ROUNDUP

November 14, 1991

Legislative Week in Review

- To no one's surprise, the Senate this week rejected House changes in its **emergency needs assistance bill**. The upper chamber originally passed SB 219 to transfer administration of \$43 million in block grants from local governments to the state. The Democrat-led House had added \$102 million in restored funds to the version it returned to the Senate. The bill is now headed for conference committee, and in the meantime both chambers' appropriations committees have okayed a \$3 million transfer permitting the Department of Social Services to start covering shelter, food, heat, and other basic needs of the state's poor.
- In related news, two Democratic senators have introduced a bill to open capitol hallways as an **overnight shelter** for the homeless. Critics of the plan sponsored by William Faust (Westland) and John Kelly (Detroit) have called it an ill-considered public relations ploy.
- Using force or threat to steal someone's automobile in his/her presence would be a ten-year felony under the **auto piracy bill** passed this week in the Senate. The measure defines a new crime in the state, in response to a spate of "carjackings" in the Detroit area, some of which resulted in the death of the owner. SB 507, which defines the crime and mandates a minimum ten-year sentence, passed 20-13, while a package of bills (SBs 536-543) permitting the prosecution of juveniles for the new offense, passed without opposition.
- As the sun sets on Michigan's **telecommunications laws**, the massive revisions considered by both House and Senate are now headed for conference committee. With a December 31 expiration of current regulatory statutes, it had been hoped that passage of SB 124 could have been achieved without requiring a conference. That was not an option due to House action last week, when close to 100 amendments were considered and more than 50 were adopted, substantially reshaping the Senate version of the bill.

Political News

- In a move that surprised some colleagues, chairman Thomas Reed of the **Michigan State University Board of Trustees** announced his resignation this week. Governor John Engler appointed Kellogg Foundation Chairman Russell Mawby to serve the six remaining years in Reed's second term.
- Governor Engler has invited Lansing native Earvin "Magic" Johnson to become a **spokesman on AIDS** for the state health department, following the sports star's announced retirement from basketball due to recently diagnosed HIV infection.
- Four executive orders **revamping the Department of Natural Resources** issued last week have sparked an outcry from legislators and interest groups who charge that the changes go beyond streamlining and reduce the level of environmental protection afforded citizens. The shakeup, announced by the governor as a way to increase the accountability of an agency "shielded by boards and commissions," abolishes the Air and Water Resources Commission plus 18 other boards and commissions, with authority over permits, game seasons, and rules devolving to the DNR director. That agency director still will be appointed by the Natural Resources Commission, which retains its status as the overall policy board, although its chair will be appointed by the governor and no longer chosen by the commission. Despite some legislative criticism of the changes, especially of an apparent weakening of the carefully negotiated "polluters pay" bill passed last session, the Republican-controlled Senate is expected to accede to the governor's initiative; overturning the executive orders would require rejection by a majority of both legislative chambers. The changes will become effective January 6, 1992.
- A three-judge **court of appeals panel** last week unanimously upheld the state's termination of general assistance welfare six weeks ago. The decision overturned an Ingham County circuit judge's ruling barring the cutoffs until each recipient was screened for alternative assistance and allowed an appeals process. Hours after the appeals court ruling, operators of hotels catering to Detroit's poor who had been awaiting some signal from the courts began evicting nonpaying tenants. Michigan Legal Services, an organization representing defendants in the case, says it will seek state supreme court review of the case.
- In a *Detroit News* poll released last weekend, Governor Engler drew a **voter approval** rating of 39 percent. More than half those polled—53 percent—said they disapproved of the first-term Republican's performance. The governor discounted the accuracy of the newspaper's sample of 600 state voters, 60 percent of whom supported his administration's elimination of general assistance welfare for single "able-bodied" adults.
- All six major declared Democratic **presidential candidates** appeared together for the first time this week for the national AFL-CIO convention in Detroit, each seeking endorsement from the powerful labor organization. "All six are good candidates and looming over and above them all is Cuomo," Mayor Coleman Young told the *Detroit Free Press*, referring to the New York City mayor's claim to front-runner status, should he decide to declare his candidacy.