

Michigan ROUNDUP

December 4, 1992

Legislative and Political News

- Lawmakers met Thursday to **wrap up** one of the shortest—and some contend least productive—sessions in state history. The total number of House and Senate session days in 1992 was the lowest since the legislature began meeting year-round, according to the *Lansing State Journal*, which reported that the two chambers averaged fewer than three sessions a month since July. “It’s a pretty skimpy schedule for a full-time legislature,” Karen Holcomb-Merrill, executive director of Common Cause of Michigan, told the *Journal*. Among the unresolved issues the 86th legislature will leave behind are stalled proposals on property tax relief and reform measures for automobile insurance, health care, and campaign finance.
- The **87th legislature** will convene on January 13, 1993. *Roundup* will not be published during the recess; the next issue is scheduled for January 14.
- At the several statewide hearings scheduled by the **State Officers Compensation Commission (SOCC)**, most citizens have testified against giving pay raises to legislators and other elected officials. The SOCC meets biennially to recommend salaries for the governor, lieutenant governor, supreme court justices, and members of the state House and Senate. Under the state constitution, the panel’s proposed pay levels must be submitted by December 31 and automatically take effect unless rejected by the legislature before February 1.
- State canvassers face a pre-Christmas deadline to complete **seven recounts** in contested elections. In addition to a review of the 54-B District Court race where an incumbent lost by 67 votes, Democrats have requested recounts in five House races and Republicans have asked for one. If any of these legislative recounts change the winner, then control of the lower chamber would shift from its current 55–55 deadlock. Recertified election results in each of the recounted races will be released on December 23.
- Just before Thanksgiving, House Democrats passed the controversial **rules change** that continues Democratic control of the chamber if neither party can muster 56 or more votes. Republicans are considering a court challenge to HR 1136 unless the measure becomes moot as a result of a recount or a Democratic defector.
- Citing the uncertainty over **future House control**, Michigan Department of Management and Budget Director Patricia Woodworth has announced that she will not pay House bills—including its employee payroll—unless expenses are authorized by both Democratic and Republican party leaders. Woodworth denied charges by House Speaker Curtis Hertel that the plan was politically motivated. Hertel said that the clerk of the House is the presiding officer until one political party takes control and called the joint approval plan illegal and unnecessary.
- The Senate passed, without amendment, a ban on **assisted suicide** pending the final report of a legislative commission as the upper chamber completed its business for the year on Thursday. The House passed HB 4501 last week, creating a new felony classification in the wake of the latest physician-assisted death in the state.
- PSC’s *Public Opinion Monitor (POM)* released this week shows the availability of **affordable health care** ranks as one of the top three national priorities for Michigianians, along with reducing the federal deficit and creating more jobs. Underwritten by the Michigan Hospital Association, the POM surveyed 800 residents. Their top three state priorities were job creation, environmental protection, and reducing crime and drug use. The poll shows state residents perked up following the election of Bill Clinton: In June 66 percent of respondents felt the country was headed in the wrong direction; that number dropped to 43 percent just after the election.
- A Macomb County Circuit Court judge ruled the state’s **tax base sharing** program constitutional as long as funding is not taken from state-mandated programs, such as special education. In the ruling allowing the so-called Robin Hood plan to stand, Judge Lido Bucci stated that it was not the court’s place to second-guess the legislature’s conclusion on the existence of inequities in school district funding. But while the court declared the tax base sharing provision a “proper” manner in which to deal with district funding equalization, it also said that the state may not confiscate all state aid from those districts that do not wish to participate.
- Gov. John Engler gets a **glowing report** in the December *Reader’s Digest*. Along with the governors of Wisconsin and Massachusetts, Michigan’s chief executive is characterized as “Three Who Dare.” Engler is credited with reshaping state government “against fierce opposition from entrenched defenders of the status quo.”