

Tax break vote tactics stir legal battle in House

The vote was so lopsided that there seemed to be little controversy over the Michigan Legislature's decision to delay some of the senior citizen property tax exemption for a year.

The House passed the \$14-million money-saving bill 61-26 with nine Ob-

server & Eccentric area representatives supporting it and two absent—Mel Larsen (R-Oxford) and Sal Rocca (D-Sterling Heights).

But Rep. R. Robert Geake (R-Northville) and several outstate Republican conservatives cried "foul" at the parliamentary tactics used as the House prepared to adjourn late in December.

And Geake said recently that two of the minority members are "requesting an opinion from the attorney general regarding the constitutionality of all this." The opinion has not yet been received.

Earlier in 1975, the Legislature had passed a bill to give rebates to persons whose property taxes exceed 3.5 per cent of their total incomes, allowing rebates up to \$1,200. Farmers and the elderly were expected to benefit.

When the state budget got into trouble, legislative leaders sought to roll back the top amount to \$200, thus saving the state coffers \$14 million.

Ordinarily, bills take effect April 1 of the following year unless the Legislature musters a two-thirds majority to give the bill immediate effect. If property tax rebates were to be reduced, the bill had to have immediate effect, and so the two-thirds vote question became all-important. In the House, that meant 74 votes.

GEAKE CHARGED the bill had only 61 votes and that opponents had enough signatures on a petition to require a roll call vote.

But in what opponents called a "fast gravel" tactic, Chairman James O'Neill (D-Saginaw), filling in for Speaker Bobby Crim, said there was a two-thirds voice vote in favor of immediate effect and declared the motion passed.

Geake and the minority contend O'Neill and the majority acted unconstitutionally. "Michigan property owners were cheated out of \$14 million in property tax relief," said Geake. "Passage of the measure will be especially hard on senior citizens, farmers, veterans, the disabled, eligible widows and all others who have relatively low or moderate incomes but high property taxes."

Speaker Crim accused the minority of using the exemption battle as an election year gimmick. "All of a sudden this is an emotional issue. People are saying we haven't done anything for senior citizens," Crim scoffed.

Supporting the rollback were Reps. John Bennett (D-Redford), Thomas Brown (D-Westland), William Keith (D-Garden City), John Markey (D-Livonia), Roy Smith (R-Ypsilanti), W.V. Brotherton (R-Farmington), James Delebaugh (R-Birmingham), Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park) and Ruth McNamee (R-Birmingham).

3 Oakland cities in top 10 in housing

Three Observer & Eccentric area communities ranked among the top 10 in the seven-county region of southeastern Michigan in residential construction, according to figures for the first half of 1975.

Troy was third, behind Sterling Heights and Detroit, in the number of gross residential units authorized. Farmington Hills ranked seventh and West Bloomfield Township ninth.

In general, housing starts declined by half in the first six months of 1975 compared to the same period of 1974. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, which compiled the figures, noted that multifamily units dropped by more than 75 per cent and single-family units 21 per cent.

High prime interest rates were blamed for the drastic slowdown in housing.

Here is a rundown of area communities which listed 10 or more new housing units in the first half of 1975.

Arena Township—74 single-family units, 11 demolitions, net total of 63 additions.

Beverly Hills—11 new single-family units.

Bloomfield Township—96 single-family units minus one demolition for a net addition of 95.

Farmington—10 single-family units, 10 multi-family units, total of 20.

Farmington Hills—40 single-family units, 150 multi-family, minus 11 demolitions for a net total of 232 new units.

Farmington Hills was practically alone in issuing more building permits for multiples than for single-family units.

Oakland Township—29 single-family units, minus two demolitions, net of 27 new units.

Recheater—12 new single-family units.

Southfield—26 new single-family units, five demolitions, net addition of 21 units. It was a major change for Southfield, an apartment leader for many years.

Troy—371 single-family units and 20 multiples for a total of 391 new units, less 18 demolitions, yielding a net total of 373. Troy has been among the regional leaders in construction for several years.

West Bloomfield Township—151 new single-family units and three multiples, minus four demolitions, for a net addition of 148 units. West Bloomfield in 1975 made its first appearance among the top 10 communities in the region.

Few communities lost housing units. A notable exception was Pontiac, which recorded two new houses and 120 demolitions for a net loss of 118 in the first half of 1975.

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