

Officials fume over tax cut drive

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

It's called the Tisch amendment and it has set county officials buzzing like bees whose hive has been invaded by a bear.

Unlike the much-publicized tax limitation proposal championed by Richard Headlee and the Southfield-based Taxpayers United for Tax Limitation, the Tisch Amendment is an out-of-the-box tax cut.

The Taxpayers United proposed constitutional amendment has all but guaranteed itself a spot on the November ballot. Supporters of the Tisch amendment are scrambling for enough signatures to get their alternative before the voters, too. They have until Monday.

"It's downright dangerous," said one high-ranking member of Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy's administration.

"Taxes are a problem," said Richard Manning (D-Redford), vice-chairman of the 27-member Wayne County Board of Commissioners. "But we don't need a meat-axe approach to the problem."

THE PROPOSAL, which is named after its sponsor, Shiawassee County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch, is Michigan's version of California's renowned, controversial Proposition 13. Moreover, Tisch's move has gained the backing of California Howard Jarvis, who led his state's tax revolt to a landslide victory at the polls last month.

Tisch's amendment would:

- Slash Michigan property taxes by 50 per cent from whatever they are on Dec. 30, 1978. A house assessed at \$40,000, for example, beginning Jan. 1, 1979 would be on the tax rolls at \$20,000.

- Limit future increases in property assessments to no more than 2½ per cent a year.

- Slip a 5.6 per cent ceiling on the state income tax. The present state income tax rate is 4.6 per cent. At the ceiling rate, insufficient revenue could be produced to offset the property tax cut.

- Prohibit the state government from ordering a city, county, village or school district to begin new programs without first providing the funds.

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— Richard Manning
Wayne County Commissioner

"TOO DRASTIC," "irresponsible," "too severe" and "unreasonable"—that's the way the Tisch amendment has been described.

Opponents of California's overwhelmingly-approved tax cut said the same thing before the rollback was approved in the beginning of June. Now the same thing is being said by Wayne and Oakland County leaders as the deadline for filing petitions to place Tisch Amendment on the November ballot nears.

"They don't have nearly as much publicity as the tax limitation drive," said Patrick Nowak, Oakland County's specialist in governmental relations. "But it could pass."

Tisch has brought his tax-cut campaign to the metropolitan area in an effort to get the 125,000 needed signatures to put his proposal on the ballot in addition to the tax limitation amendment.

AS THE TISCH amendment gained publicity, though, county officials have taken heat and are predicting doom if the plan is approved.

In financially-beleaguered Wayne County, the Tisch amendment's effects would be "devastating," Manning said.

According to Manning and the county's bureau of taxation, Wayne County would lose \$45 million in tax revenue. The county already faces an estimated \$8 million to \$12 million deficit for the fiscal year ending Nov. 30.

The hardest-hit victim of Tisch's proposal, Manning said, would be the county's school districts, which would lose \$233 million.

Cities, towns and villages in Wayne County would find their tax coffers \$130 million emptier, he said. The intermediate school districts would lose \$7 million and the community college's in the county would lose \$6 million.

"What we'd have to do is reduce our

total work force by about half," Manning said.

"It took me three hours to get these tax figures," he said, "I don't know how long it would take if there were a 50 per cent reduction in the staff."

IN OAKLAND COUNTY, which is facing another "austerity budget," officials label Tisch's proposal "downright dangerous."

"If we're talking about a 50 per cent reduction," Nowak said, "we're getting right down to talking about essential services. That means police and fire services."

"The people of this county wouldn't want a situation where services are rolled back to that degree," Nowak said.

California's officials said much the same thing, yet Proposition 13 won easily.

COUNTY EXECUTIVE Daniel Murphy has already joined Headlee's camp. He announced his endorsement of Taxpayers United's more moderate tax limitation plan long before news of Tisch's tax-cut drive reached metro Detroit.

According to Murphy's office, there are no plans to switch allegiance.

Oakland officials maintain that Tisch's amendment "just would not work."

In addition to a crippling cut in revenues, Nowak said the 2½ per cent ceiling on future assessment increases threatens the continued existence of county government.

"The inflation rate, if more than 2½ per cent, would mean taxes would be cut even more."

"Government would fall further and further and further behind. It just couldn't keep up with the effects of inflation."

"If taxes are allowed to grow by 2½ per cent a year, government just won't be able to survive," Nowak predicted.

MURPHY, MANNING and Nowak all agree that pulling the reins in on runaway government spending is a must. But they argue that the target of taxpayer and voter discontent should be the state government, not local units.

Wayne and Oakland counties, they said, have had unwanted, expensive new programs dumped in their laps without any accompanying money to ease the bite on their budgets.

"Before the fiscal year starts," Manning said, "we decide how we're going to spend our money. Six months later the legislature meets and says, 'Here's a new program we'd like you to put in place.'"

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YWmoves for ERA

The YWCA National Board has voted to move its 1979 national triennial convention from Louisville to Dallas because of the uncertainty about Equal Rights Amendment ratification in Kentucky.

Louisville had been selected as the site for the 1979 convention in light of earlier ratification of ERA by the Kentucky legislature. However, developments in recent months, including rescission by the Kentucky legislature which was vetoed by Lt. Gov. Thelma Stovall, and the continuing effort of some forces in the state to bring the measure back to the legislature for further action of rescission prompted the National Board to change the convention site.

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