

County sings the budget blues ...

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

"Gimme a B, Gimme a U, Gimme a D, Gimme a G, Gimme an E, Gimme a T."

"Gimme BUDGET."

That's the chant as the Oakland County Board of Commissioners moves into a long series of budget sessions. But floating in a turbulent sea of the tax revolt, they warn that it's easier said than done.

The situation is complicated not only by the specter of the November passage of the Tisch tax cut constitutional amendment but by the possibility that Oakland may cut funding for Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) programs.

Oakland County currently administers \$38 million in CETA funds.

ON THE SURFACE, commissioners have committed themselves to a 1978-level budget. This year's budget totaled nearly \$75 million.

Some commissioners feel that is an impossible goal.

"To do that, you're looking at a flat 10 per cent cut in employees across the board. It would mean sending out notices to vendors telling them not to raise their prices. It would mean there would be no raises for county employees in 1978, regardless of what their contracts say," explained Commissioner Dennis Murphy (R-Nov), vice chairman of the board's finance committee.

Trying to adhere rigidly to the 1978 budget, he said, means ignoring inflation. It also means ignoring the fact that the county has no control

over some functions which it is responsible for funding.

Oakland County, for example, must find three new circuit court judges, their staffs and offices. These positions were not in the 1978 budget, but will be in the 1979 budget.

"We'll be striving to achieve a happy medium," Murphy said. "When the total budget finally arrived at, you'll see that there's been a total bi-partisan approach to fiscal responsibility," Murphy predicted.

He said some programs would be cut back. Others, he predicted, might be cut out entirely.

"We're faced with the situation of satisfying the needs of Oakland County's citizens without increasing costs. You can't have them both," Murphy said.

"We have got to keep a growing

county in the black from a financial standpoint.

"Our objective is to maintain programs for the elderly and the handicapped. That's not necessarily a priority, but it's a citizen need."

BECAUSE OF THE uncertainty caused by the presence of two tax-related state constitutional amendments on the November ballot, it is all but impossible to predict the final 1979 budget, Murphy said.

Ignoring the tax limitation and tax cap proposals, he said just maintaining the current budget with no expansion would cost the county an additional \$6 million. A no growth County package would cost about \$3 million this time around, he predicted.

Oakland's financial position as an economically sound, growing county, strangely enough, could mean a reduction in the current 5.23-mill county tax levy.

According to Murphy, a 10 per cent inflation factor is already built into the State Equalized Valuation (SEV) formula. Thus, county revenues would grow well beyond the additional \$6 million the county would need to maintain the same services as last year.

Hence, the 5.23-mill levy would probably be reduced, Murphy predicted.

ALL THAT, however, could go down the drain if the Tisch tax cut amendment is approved in November.

The Tisch amendment would reduce Oakland County property tax revenues in half.

If it is approved, Murphy said, "You're gonna see some midnight oil burning around this place."

"This county's going to operating on a month-to-month basis," he predicted.

...with sour notes for Tisch

The tax-slashing Tisch amendment may have captured the hearts of some Michigan taxpayers, but it's not getting the same reaction from the state's tax spenders.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners last week overwhelmingly voiced its opposition to the proposed state constitutional amendment that would cut property taxes in half. The vote was 26-2 with two abstentions.

Commissioners disapproving of the amendment, which has been labelled a "meat axe approach to tax limitation," included: John McDonald (R-Farmington), Lillian Moffitt (R-Bloomfield Township), Dennis Murphy (R-Nov), Joseph Montante (R-Orchard Lake), Robert Page (R-Birmingham), Alex-

ander Perinoff (D-Southfield), Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield), and John Peterson (R-Rochester).

Commissioner Henry W. Hoag (R-Bloomfield Township) voted against the resolution.

Commissioner Robert McConnell (R-Farming Hills) was not present for the vote, and Commissioner John Mosley was one of two who abstained.

According to the commissioners, the Tisch amendment, which would reduce property assessments to one-half their present level, "would shift the burden of taxation from corporations and businesses to wage earners, senior citizens and others on fixed incomes."

Commissioners also charged that

the amendment, which will likely be on the general election ballot, will at least one other tax limitation amendment, "does not provide citizens with any protection against significant increases in present taxes, nor any protection against the creation of new taxes by the state and other units of government."

Also, they said, taxation would be shifted from local units of government to the state. Such a shift, they said, would result in a "significant loss of control."

Hoag, one of two commissioners who voted against the resolution, said he voted "no" because it was wrong for the board of commissioners to take a stand on the issue.



Parting is such sweet sorrow

Heaven knows why, but some folks like this cowpoke at a recent rodeo in Westland enjoy being kicked around. (Photo by Steve Fecht)

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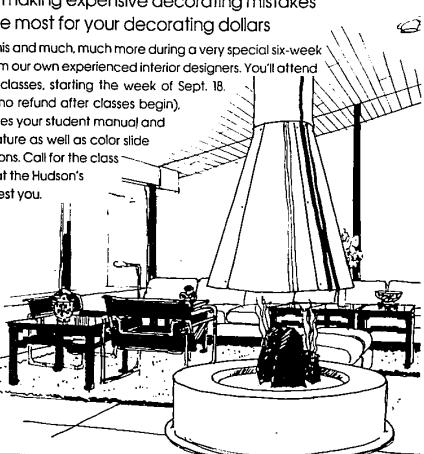
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