

House Dems unveil tax relief plans

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Michigan House Democrats, who took much of the heat during last summer's tax revolt, have put "property tax relief" at the top of their laundry list.

House Speaker Bobby Crim (D-Davidson) and Majority Floor Leader Joseph Forbes (D-Southfield) vowed a new tax system during the new legislative session that began last week.

According to Crim and Forbes, relief will come by expanding Michigan's "circuit-breaker" program. Under the program, property taxes paid above a specified income level are rebated through the state income tax refunds.

"Michigan," Crim said, "already has the most extensive and expensive circuit-breaker property tax relief program in the country. Yet the voters have told us it's not enough."

Forbes added, "To meet the challenge of property tax relief, we have to have a major expansion of the circuit-breaker."

THAT EXPANSION, under the Democratic plan, will mean senior citizens and the disabled will qualify for a 100 per cent property tax rebate. Other "general taxpayers" will get a 75 per cent rebate.

Under the present circuit-breaker, there are six different scales governing the size of your property tax rebate.

While a new circuit-breaker formula has not been determined, House Democratic researchers promise a "considerably more simplified system."

"The new formula will give significantly more relief to persons earning \$10,000 to \$30,000," one House researcher said.

Crim and Forbes proposed increasing the personal income exemption to at least \$1,800 per person. The exemption now is \$1,500.

They also proposed that the property tax allowance for renters be increased from 17 per cent to 20 per cent. PROPERTY TAX relief will mean a tax break for some and a tax shift for others.

"Tax relief, in the absolute sense, is seldom possible," Crim said. "Responsible fiscal policy requires that we provide tax relief through a shift to the state income tax sufficient to fully fund this program," he said.

Forbes and other House Democrats agree that it means a one per cent, across-the-board increase in the state income tax.

"Whether you win or lose (under the

proposed tax system)," said a house staff researcher, "will depend on how high your property tax is in relation to your income and how many deductions you have."

EVEN THOUGH Democratic leaders say they have no intention of trying to institute a graduated income tax, which would require a constitutional amendment, Republican leaders have raised that spectre.

Speaking in Birmingham several weeks ago, House Minority Leader William Bryant (R-Grosse Pointe Farms) scolded Democrats for trying to tie property tax relief to the establishment of a graduated income tax.

In response, Forbes called Bryant "all wet."

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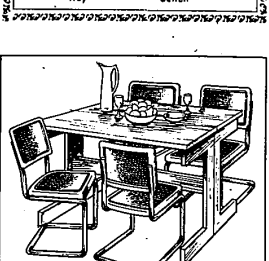
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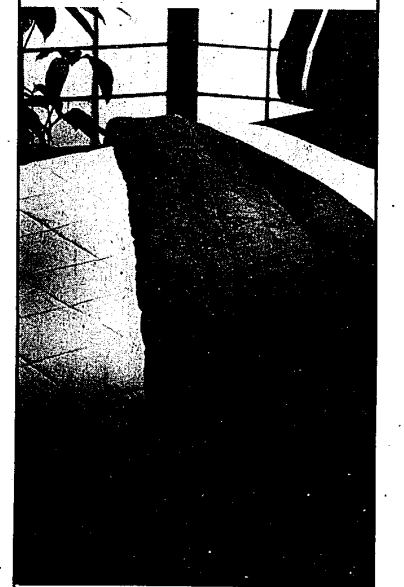
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HUDSON'S

Prison chief to speak

Perry Johnson, director of the Michigan Department of Corrections, will speak at 2 p.m. Tuesday in the Bloomfield Township Library, Telegraph at Lone Pine roads.

The program is being sponsored by Oakland County Court Watchers, a four-year-old group of volunteers who monitor the county bench.

Court Watcher director Yvonne Atkinson said Johnson will discuss

Michigan's prison system.

"We need to understand the system," Mrs. Atkinson said. "More and more, citizens are being required to determine things about the prison system. And they just don't know anything about it."

"Most of the court watchers don't even understand the system," she said. The program is free and open to the public.

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