

County drops Social Security issue

The Oakland County Employees Retirement Commission's proposal that the county withdraw its 3,500 employees from the federal social security system probably won't be considered until next year.

The nine-member panel had asked the County Board of Commissioners last month to file a withdrawal notice with the federal government by Dec. 31.

But opposition from Democratic commissioners and labor unions and "panic" among some county employees led to the request's being tabled in two county board meetings.

"It's a dead issue for this year as far as I'm concerned," said Eugene Guido, director of the Southern regional office of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

He said AFSCME would "continue to be opposed until there's a thorough investigation and they offer the same kinds of benefits at lesser costs to both

the employees and employer.

"At this point in time, they can't do that," Guido said.

LAST WEEK, the full county board let the notice issue die.

"We're right back where we started," said Republican Caucus leader Robert Gonsline of Milford. There had been speculation that Republicans, who control the board, 16-11, would overturn the committee.

A study comparing Social Security benefits and costs with private insurance plans is likely before the county even considers dropping out of the federal pension system.

And according to county Treasurer C. Hugh Dohany, the county can't withdraw without a vote of its employees.

Dohany, who's also executive secretary of the Employees Retirement Commission, said last week that giving the federal government two years notice to withdraw, as required, is "not as rushing as it was."

Dohany said the retirement panel was told by County Civil Counsel Robert Allen that the state would have to file the notice after the county board passed a resolution.

"There's no way the state would get a letter of intent in before the end of the year," Dohany said.

NEVERTHELESS, the retirement board, he said, still wants the withdrawal investigated.

Such a study may be considered this month by the county board's personnel committee, said committee chairman John McDonald, R-Farmington Hills.

Dohany added: "It's possible next year they (county employees) may be given all the facts, both pro and con, and asked to take a vote on it."

AFSCME, which represents an estimated 400 county workers, opposed withdrawal from the social security

system, as did county board Democrats. Because employees were confused on the issue, some Republican commissioners opposed filing a withdrawal notice as well.

BESIDES retirement benefits, social security provides death and disability benefits to an employee's dependants. Some commissioners have questioned whether a private insurance plan could match the combination of benefits.

Social security has come under fire in recent years as payroll deductions through the FICA tax have risen steadily. Moreover, retirement benefits alone are widely considered insufficient for retirees faced by continuing inflation.

Dohany said the county has budgeted \$3 million as its share of the 1980 social security tax. The employees will roughly match that amount in payroll deductions.

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