

Budget ceiling amendment wins proponents in Lansing

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Pressure is mounting in the Michigan Senate to approve a resolution calling for a Constitutional amendment mandating a balanced federal budget.

Twenty-seven state legislators have already approved similar resolutions. Local state senators, however, split over the resolution calling on Congress to propose a balanced budget amendment or convene a Constitutional Convention to amend the 191-year-old document. The proposal is currently lodged in the senate judiciary committee.

The resolution was introduced by State Sens. John Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, and Edward Fredericks, R-Holland. It was supported by 18 other state senators including Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, and Robert Geake, R-Northville.

SUPPORTERS say balancing the federal budget is the only way to bring double-digit inflation under control. They also say adding to the \$789 billion national debt must be avoided in an effort to bolster the sagging U.S. dollar on foreign money markets.

Locally, State Sen. Doug Ross, D-Oak Park, opposes the resolution and State Sens. William Faust, D-Westland, and William Huffman, D-Madison Heights, have taken no public position.

Opponents say a constitutional amendment would handcuff the

government's ability to deal with national emergencies or major recessions. Furthermore, they say, opening up the Constitution to a convention would be too radical and could result in major changes in the document.

"THE CITIZENS are paying nearly \$1 billion a week in interest alone on the federal deficit," Bishop said, "yet Congress keeps on spending and spending. The federal government, like state government — and every household, for that matter — must learn to live within its means."

The north Oakland senator added that the country's "tremendous inflationary and unemployment problems" resulted from Congress' free-wheeling spending policies.

Geake is more vocal. The western Wayne County senator said he would like to see the budget balanced immediately.

Congress' spending policies, he said, "are not the results of true national need. Instead it's the product of weak politicians that like to give away people's money."

TO BALANCE the budget, Geake said \$29 billion should be cut from social programs. "In the long run," he said "they (the poor and minorities) will be the winners. It'll free up hundreds of millions of dollars that can be channeled back into the economy," he said.

When questioned why the Department of Defense, another large budget line item, would be spared the knife, Geake said, "We need a strong national defense. If we lose our strength and standing internationally, we could be taken over by a foreign power."

ROSS, THE former director of the Michigan's Citizens Lobby, argued for a moderate approach. While he agreed that Congress should balance the budget, he said it could be responsibly done only over a two- or three-year period.

Deficit spending, he said, is a fact of life. "Supporters of the resolution keep saying that government should have to live within its bounds just like families do," he said. "If that were true, there would be no mortgages. Aren't mortgages deficit spending?"

While some congressmen and President Carter are at odds over the proposed federal budget, others are dealing out warnings to state legislators.

U.S. Sen. Edmund Muskie, D-Maine, chairman of the senate budget committee, has already warned the state officials that any cuts will be made in areas upon which they depend.

Carter and Congress have already eliminated "anti-recession, counter-cyclical" funds — money paid out to local governments based on unemployment statistics. CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) funds also have been pared.

Move to fatter pension plan fails to impress Murphy

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Oakland County employees may go on working until they are 70, but they stop accruing retirement benefits when they are 65.

Some county commissioners want to change that policy, but they face opposition from County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

Commissioner James Doyon, D-Madison Heights, called the current policy

unfair. Moreover, he said, the county could save approximately \$200,000 a year by allowing its employees to work and collect benefits until the age of 70.

The proposal was rejected last week by the board of commissioners' personnel committee. But Doyon said he would re-submit the proposal to the committee in an effort to bring it to the full board March 22.

"IT WOULD mean savings of \$200,000 a year. That's \$1 million over five years that would be available for reinvestment," Doyon said during floor debate.

He also challenged contentions that workers over the age of 65 were unproductive and less productive than younger workers.

Pointing to five county employees who are 65 or older, Doyon said, "They are more mature, more stable and more willing to do the job that's wanted. It's a case of employees really clinging on."

Quoting Oakland employment statistics, the Madison Heights commission-

er said the over-65 employees were absent far less than the average worker. According to the statistics, the average Oakland worker misses 10.6 days of work.

"Four out of five missed fewer days," Doyon said, "and one never missed a day."

THE DIFFERENCE between him and Murphy, a Republican, is more philosophical than partisan.

"Allowing people to accumulate retirement benefits until the age of 70 would hamper the hiring of younger people," the county executive said. "Hiring younger people means new ideas and more motivation."

"That's the way it's done in private industry," Murphy said.

Because private employers allow early retirement, Murphy added, allowing workers to accrue retirement benefits to the age of 70 could begin a trend to hiring older workers.

"A person could retire from private industry at the age of 62," Murphy said, "then come to work for us for eight years and receive benefits."

Wildlife info bill offered by Pursell

U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, has introduced a bill designed to protect environmentally-sensitive plants and animals.

The Wildlife Information and Learning Development (WILD) Act he proposes would establish a public information clearinghouse in the federal office of endangered species. The office would be primarily responsible for distributing educational materials concerning endangered plants and animals.

A major feature of the bill is a grant program, which would be open to colleges, universities, non-profit organizations and local school systems.

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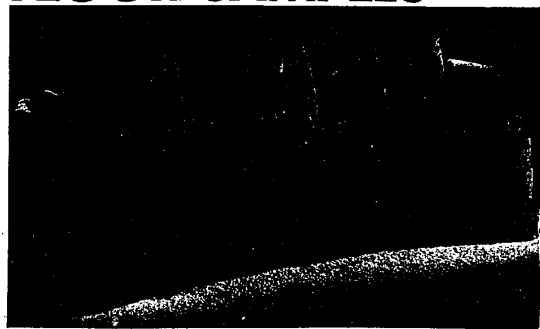
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