

Lawmakers grapple over Olympic wrestler's aid

By TOM LONERGAN

Nobody called it "special interest" legislation, but the Michigan Legislature recently endorsed a plan that will affect one person — an unidentified state employee who may compete in the 1980 Olympic Games as a wrestler.

A resolution asked that the state Civil Service Commission grant any state employee who participates in the Olympics a month off at full pay and fringe benefits.

It passed the House of Representatives on a voice vote without opposition, but earlier this month had a tougher time in the Senate. Senators passed the resolution, 20-15, after a lively debate concerning the state's subsidizing amateur athletes.

TWO UNLIKELY allies, Sen. Doug Ross, D-Oak Park, a liberal, and Sen. John Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, regarded as among the most conservative, led opposition to the plan.

Ross, whose district includes Southfield and Farmington, called the proposal "inappropriate in principle."

"We've tended to be critical of the Soviet Union for sending people who are not amateurs and are subsidized by the Soviet government," Ross said. "The resolution would begin to move us towards something of the same principle."

Next year's summer games are in Moscow, and the winter games will be in upstate New York. Although Ross said Welborn was an "ironic" ally, he added: "We both tend to be quite suspicious of delegating too much authority to bureaucracies and are sensitive on issues of individual rights."

ALSO VOTING against the Olympic plan was Sen. Donald Bishop, R-Rochester.

Favoring it were Sens. Robert Geake, R-Northville, who represents Plymouth, Livonia and Redford, and William Faust, D-Westland, whose district includes Garden City and Canton.

Sen. Bill Huffman, D-Madison Heights, who represents a portion of Troy, did not vote.

Geake said he didn't think the subsidy argument was valid. "It's very important to encourage America's international standing in every way, including the Olympics," he said. "The state should do whatever it can to encourage physical fitness and athletics."

The resolution was sponsored by State Rep. Thaddeus Stopczynski, D-Detroit, who predicted the civil service commission would approve the plan.

"It's something we should do for the country," Stopczynski said. "If it involved an outrageous number of people, I wouldn't have sponsored it."

Nine other states have approved similar plans, Stopczynski said. He hoped the legislature's action would encourage large corporations to do the same.

ROSS AGREED that the civil service commission would approve the Olympic plan. "Since the legislature has to pay for it, there's little incentive for

them (civil service) not to go along," he said.

The freshman senator feared the legislature established a principle of assisting any state employee involved in an amateur contest.

"What if I want to train for the Miss America contest?" Ross said. "What's the difference?"

Geake said the endorsement of the Olympic plan should not be binding on any future legislature.

Road board seeks SEMTA divorce

The Oakland County Road Commission is banging the drum for the county, to pull out of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

In a report released last week, the road commission proposed the county establish its own transportation agency to provide intra-county service.

The road commission declared a county transportation agency would provide three times better service in Oakland than SEMTA does, with no new taxes.

THE REPORT was prepared for the Board of Commissioners Planning and Building Committee, which in April asked County Executive Daniel Murphy to study the feasibility of a county transportation agency. The road commission said its report is "input" for Murphy's which isn't expected until next month.

The county board requested the study shortly after SEMTA approved a \$1.4 billion regional transit plan that includes a part-subway, part-elevated along Woodward Avenue from downtown Detroit to Eight Mile Road.

Several county commissioners, who have twice threatened to pull out of SEMTA, believe the regional plan shortchanges Oakland residents.

THE ROAD COMMISSION report said the regional plan "concentrates 90 percent of all funds on a gamble to revitalize a short length of Woodward Avenue."

The county would gain a larger proportionate share of state and federal transportation money through its own agency, the report said, than that currently spent by SEMTA within the county.

"SEMTA has been preoccupied with rationalizing a capital intensive rapid transit system and not with the total

transit needs of the region," the road commission report said.

"SEMTA has responded primarily to the desires of the City of Detroit," the report said, adding that Oakland County's efforts to develop a regional transit plan "that met the needs of all area residents equitably" have been ignored.

A SEMTA spokesman said Tuesday — 14 days after the report was dated — that "the road commission hasn't provided us a copy."

He added "it's not logical they can provide three times as much service for less money than SEMTA can."

Asked if the road commission had contacted SEMTA for any background information, the SEMTA spokesman said, "We didn't even know they were working on it."

THE COUNTY board of commissioners won't do anything with the road commission report until it gets Murphy's, according to Commissioner Richard Wilcox, R-Ortonville, chairman of the planning and building committee.

"I've always favored withdrawing from SEMTA," Wilcox said, adding that the creation of an independent Oakland transportation agency will not be easy.

"We'd have to have the governor's blessing," he said, noting that Gov. Milliken has supported SEMTA's regional plan and subway.

Wilcox added the county's leaving SEMTA may jeopardize the \$600 million the federal government has promised to get the SEMTA regional plan off the ground. The government insists on agreement among seven southeastern counties on any plan.

MURPHY VETOED a board of commissioners decision to leave SEMTA a year ago, and the veto was upheld by the board.

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