

Commission feud over audit bid action

By TOM LONERGAN

A recommendation that Oakland County not grant a three-year auditing contract to the lowest bidding firm has Democratic county commissioners up in arms.

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy's Office of Management and Budget, backed by most of the Republican county board majority, urged last week that a three-year "independent audit" be awarded to the Coopers and Lybrand accounting firm rather than Ernst & Whinney, whose \$160,000 bid was nearly \$321,000 lower.

Coopers & Lybrand bid \$480,900 on the audit, a state requirement for counties to remain eligible for federal revenue sharing funds. The state is expected to pay 25 percent of the audit.

The county portion of Coopers & Lybrand's proposed contract would be \$140,875 more than the \$120,000 it would pay Ernst & Whinney.

WITH TWO Republican commissioners absent, the county board GOP bloc voted last week to table awarding the contract. Republicans, who didn't have the 14 votes needed to pass the contract, vowed to resume the item at the Dec. 11 board meeting. The 13-10 vote to table was supported by all but one Republican commissioner present.

"I don't know how in good conscience we can award anything other than the low bid," said Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield. "I don't know what is going on with the state or in our structure, but I think something is just rotten."

County administration officials and Republican commissioners said the state would not approve Ernst & Whinney for the audit, which will cover all county departments drawing the bulk of their budgets from general fund tax revenues.

"The state indicated they would not go with the low bidder," said Commissioner Dennis Murphy, R-Novi, chair of the county board finance committee, which recommended 7-2 that Coopers

& Lybrand get the audit. "These are not bids," added James Brennan, county budget director, who preferred to call them proposals. He said the county is not legally required to award the contract to the low bidder as is usually the norm in public works and construction contracts.

A RATING system Brennan's staff used to judge the 10 accounting firms which bid on the audit showed Ernst & Whinney in a tie with Coopers & Lybrand.

Among other firms bidding lower were Price Waterhouse & Co., Haskins & Sells, and Arthur Young & Co.

Brennan told county Democrats at a caucus meeting prior to last week's county board proceedings that Ernst & Whinney was eliminated for not giving time estimates on how it would proceed with the audit.

"We gave them a zero for time because they gave us no time at all," said Brennan.

The audit covering 1979 county spending is due by next July 31, Brennan said.

"Are you willing to throw \$360,000 (the county fee to Coopers & Lybrand) to the winds because of some specious argument that (Ernst & Whinney) didn't meet every specification?" asked Commissioner Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield.

"I don't think its incumbent on the state to tell us who to hire." Eugene Kutny, a former candidate for county executive, and well-known county Democrat, works for Ernst & Whinney.

Brennan said "there weren't any political evaluations given" in the audit bid process. He said his two staff members who analyzed the accounting firm proposals were "not in a position to know the politics here."

Oakland is the first county the state is requiring to submit to the three-year special audit.

"Everyone will be watching what's going on — the other 82 counties," said Commissioner Murphy.

Tuition hike at OCC soon?

State aid cuts could lead to an Oakland Community College spring term tuition hike of 6 percent.

OCC President Robert Roelofs proposed the \$1-per-credit-hour tuition increase to the seven-member Board of Trustees last week.

If approved, in-district tuition at the five OCC campuses would be \$17.50 per credit hour, effective with the spring term. Tuition for out-of-district students would be \$27.50 per credit hour.

Trustees scheduled a Dec. 11 discussion of the tuition hike and could vote on it in January.

GOV. MILLIKEN'S state budget cuts, announced earlier this month, will mean about \$1.2 million less in state aid than OCC officials had anticipated for the 1980-81 operating budget, Roelofs said.

"I'm not going to talk hysteria or anything like that," he said in proposing the tuition hike. "We could get along without it, but it's a prudent thing to do when you compare our tuition to other colleges and we've cut into our savings."

OCC ended the 1979-80 budget year with a \$500,000 surplus. Some of those funds have been used in place of the lost state aid. Roelofs said, plus the college has not filled faculty and administrative vacancies caused by retirements and resignations.

Trustees didn't discuss the proposed increase last week, but at least two board members indicated possible opposition to the proposal.

"BY RAISING tuition we can price ourselves out of students' (reach)," said Board Chairman Earl Anderson.

"Students are what make this college. All the rest of us can go to hell, really, without students."

Trustee David Hackett of Rochester suggested the \$50,000 in extra revenue the administration expects from the tuition increase might be gained from property taxes due to increasing property values in the county.

Confab slated on Japanese cars

A conference on "The Japanese Automotive Industry: Model and Challenge for the Future?" will be held Jan. 14, 1981, at the University of Michigan.

All sessions will be held in the Power Center for the Performing Arts in Ann Arbor.

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