

Wary taxpayers giving state 'one more chance'

BY WARREN M. HOYT
Michigan Press Association

Anticipating yet another petition drive to get a property tax cutting constitutional amendment back before the voters, Gov. William G. Milliken and legislative leaders have wasted no time listing property tax reform as a top priority for the 1981 legislative session.

State government narrowly missed having the voters reduce property taxes 50 percent at the last general election. Such voter approval would have crippled state government's ability to provide basic human services.

Voters gave governmental leaders "one more chance" to do something about the spiraling property taxes with the defeat of the proposed constitutional amendment.

However, taxpayers will be closely watching governmental leaders. If they return to "business as usual" in Lansing, voters will probably reverse that decision in November 1982.

THE PROPERTY tax reform question is so important that Milliken decided to give a "reform" proposal special coverage and made his plan public two days before his all-encompassing State of the State address.

A \$785 million homestead tax reduction proposal, which includes a \$250 million reduction in state and local spending, was unveiled by the governor. He called upon the legislature to

approve a special statewide election on June 8 to present the tax proposal only to the voters.

The proposal includes a sales tax increase of 1 percent, a provision that will replace \$535 million of the \$785 million cut in property taxes.

The \$250 million not made up would be absorbed by \$125 million in spending cuts by the state and \$125 million in cuts by various local units of government.

Under the governor's proposal, the average Michigan household would see a cut in property tax bills of \$335 in 1981, but would pay about \$135 more in sales taxes, producing a net tax savings of about \$200 per household.

THE GOVERNOR and his aides said they hope the net tax cut will help to both pass the proposal and to defuse any further moves for massive tax cut plans as have been before voters in both the 1978 and 1980 elections.

The Milliken proposal would include home property tax reduction of 35 percent, beginning with the July bills, up to a maximum of \$1,400. Senior citizens would get a complete exemption on the first \$1,400 of property taxes to be adjusted annually for inflation.

Renters would be able to credit 25 percent of their rent as property taxes.

The state would reimburse local units for 89 percent of the revenue lost from direct property tax cuts, reflect-

ing the \$125 million in spending cuts to be absorbed by those units.

AT THE SPECIAL election, voters would decide only on a constitutional amendment to increase the sales tax

and earmark lottery revenues to education. The other provisions would be contained in separate bills which would only take effect upon approval of the amendment.

Officials said all the bills and the

constitutional amendment must be approved by the legislature by April 1 in order to have the special election on June 8. The date is necessary to have the reduction affect the July tax bills.

Meanwhile, legislative leaders, dur-

ing the opening sessions of the 81st Legislature, also listed property tax reform as their top priority. They generally seemed to be in agreement with the Milliken proposal and called for early action.

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