

Colleges expect worst as state aid ends

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Michigan colleges may have to say good-bye forever to their fourth-quarter state aid payments.

Gov. William G. Milliken, in announcing the withholding of their aid for the period of July 1 to Sept. 30, said he wanted to make the payment at the beginning of the state's new fiscal year Oct. 1.

"My prediction is that the state won't have the money to restore the fourth quarter state aid cut," said state Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, from his vantage point on the Senate Appropriations Committee. "When I raised that point in a leadership meeting (with Milliken), no one contradicted me."

"I don't think we'll get it either," agreed state Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City, former chairman of the House Colleges and Universities Committee. "We haven't even paid the cities and townships for conducting the 1980 presidential primary."

"We're destroying, dismantling our colleges," Keith went on. "It takes years and years to build that kind of expertise. If I were a college professor, I might be looking to other states."

THE PREDICTION was no surprise to budget officers at two area community colleges.

"We always suspected that as a possibility," said Anthony Jarson, vice-president of Oakland Community College. "We've been planning on a worst possible scenario."

Milliken's budget cuts, designed to eliminate \$450 million of a more than \$500 million deficit, will cost OCC \$2.3 million of a budget in the neighborhood of \$33 million.

"We're studying an increase in tuition," said Jarson. "I've heard some schools going up \$3 to \$7 a credit hour. We hope to keep it down as low as possible."

"We are usually well-prepared for emergencies. We've had much more modest pay increases over the last four or five years."

"We have a record enrollment. Tuition is becoming our second largest source of revenue."

AT SCHOOLCRAFT College, Comptroller A.H. Ruby is preparing the board for a possible request for a \$5-per-credit-hour tuition increase. In-district students currently pay \$22.

Schoolcraft is also contemplating levying the full voter-authorized 1.77 mills of property tax instead of rolling back the rate as assessment rises.

The state aid cut will cost Schoolcraft \$1.3 million of its approximately \$15 million budget.

Oakland University stands to lose \$4.6 million, University of Michigan-Dearborn \$2.2 million, UM-Ann Arbor \$34 million, Wayne State \$12.6 million and Michigan State \$28.3 million.

THE REASON college budget makers were pessimistic all along about receiving their fourth-quarter aid payments was that Milliken's economic predictions have been roser than reality.

Getting the blame is Milliken's director of management and budget, Dr. Gerald Miller.

"Miller is consistently over-optimistic," said Sen. Geake. "And I think the governor actually likes to

spend. At the local government level, you see pessimistic projections of revenue. You don't see that up here in Lansing."

"It was cruel to say to the college, 'We're going to pay it back,'" said Rep. Keith. "It's fairer to say 'we've got to cut it.' Miller has been playing that game since I've been up here," said Keith, now in his 10th year.

"The governor was talking four months ago about a small, token property tax relief. I have a gut feeling there will be no turnaround," said Keith, a former banker.

"They don't have the vaguest idea what kind of revenue the state will have next year," said OCC's Jarson.

MEANWHILE, Milliken's proposed tax cuts to balance the budget were undergoing a metamorphosis in the legislature.

The governor's plan to raise the income tax 0.7 percent to 5.3 percent permanently was modified in closed-door political negotiations to an increase of 1.4 percent only until Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year.

To solve the immediate cash flow problem, the House voted 61-25 approval of increasing the cigarette tax 10 cents to 21 cents a pack. Each party provided a slender majority, with 33 of 61 Democrats and 28 of 46 Republicans favoring it.

In the Senate, however, the plan was defeated in a 17-17 deadlock. Twenty votes were needed for passage.

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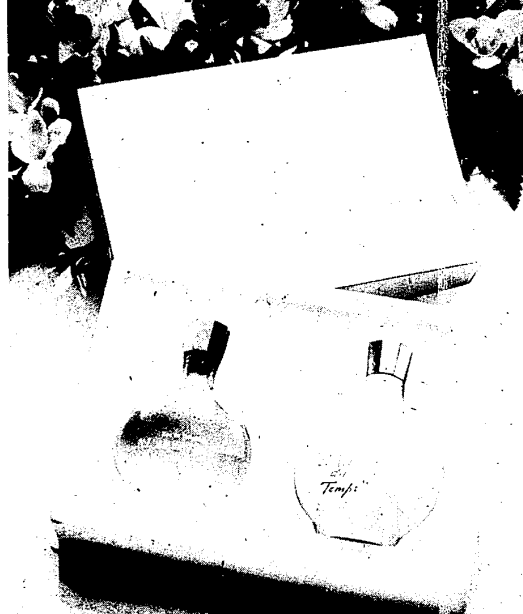
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