

# Colleges to raise tuition despite state fund increase

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

State Rep. Wilfred Webb, a man who chooses his words carefully, confessed he was "in a state of shock" last week when university presidents told him they plan to increase student tuition.

The increases are coming despite Gov. James Blanchard's new budget, which advocates 9 percent more money for the major universities and 7.5 percent more for smaller colleges.

"I had hoped we could hold the line — or even get reductions," said Webb, D-Hazel Park. "That certainly is going to be a goal of mine."

Webb, 62, was an educator for 36 years before his successful venture into politics. He won a special election to fill a House vacancy in mid-1987 and re-election from a reapportioned district in November.



Wilfred Webb  
chairman

And although he is essentially a freshman, he has drawn major committee assignments of the sort rarely given to newcomers.

• Chairman of the Colleges and Universities Committee.

• Vice chairman of the Education Committee, which deals with kindergarten-12th grade schools.

• Member of the Taxation Committee, which handled Blanchard's tax increase in March.

In part, Webb's choice assignments were due to the defeat of veteran Rep. Lucille McCollough of Dearborn, who held the Colleges and Education posts. In larger part, say Democratic leaders, they are due to Webb's own abilities.

HOUSE Speaker Gary Owen, D-Vpsilanti, said Webb drew such major committee posts, including a chairmanship, because "we're fortunate to have Ph.D.s with his kind of experience locally and his understanding of the school tax structure."

"We've had only one other person with that kind of experience since I've been in the House — Cliff Sfrart, the assistant Republican leader from Walled Lake."

The legislative race was Webb's second try for public office. In 1974, he sought the Democratic nomination for Congress but was defeated by a 32-year-old assistant attorney general named Blanchard.

## Alcoholism series set

Brighton Hospital will sponsor a program dealing with alcoholics and their problems throughout the summer.

Those who are concerned about loved ones or associates or those who believe they have a problem with alcohol should attend.

The series will be held at 6 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month, beginning June 7. Each meeting will last about 1½ hours and will be held in the Brighton Hospital Chapel.

Brighton Hospital is at 12851 E. Grand River at the corner of Kensington Road, just off the I-96 freeway. Phone number is 227-6143.

Some topics to be covered include: Identifying the alcoholic, the disease and concept of alcoholism, where the alcoholic is going, the enablers and intervention.

Trained alcoholism counselors will be on hand at each meeting.

ALTHOUGH HE has less than a year in office, Webb has much Lansing experience. After retiring from the Hazel Park School District, he worked six years as a consultant to the Senate Fiscal Agency, researching such questions as the school aid formula and funding of special education.

"That was a pretty good retirement job. I made more money than I do now, and I didn't work as hard," he said with a laugh.

A 1941 graduate of Alma College, Webb taught math for five years, was a counselor four years, a principal four years, an assistant superintendent four years and superintendent 19 years, all in Hazel Park. Along the way he earned his two advanced degrees at Wayne State University.

WEBB continues to worry about long-range college and school funding, particularly for middle-class suburbanites. "The property tax is overburdened. State participation (in school funding) is down. There are inequities between districts, even in an area like Oakland County," he said.

Universities tell him that with a major dose of new state money, they could hold the line on tuition but won't hint at a tuition reduction. Instead, they suggest state grants to cover tuition for the needy.

"Even the better off are having trouble meeting tuition," Webb counters.

He doesn't foresee the state closing any colleges, although that is sometimes suggested in Lansing. "It's tough to close one. There will be some downsizing. There will be elimination of some duplications."

"It's easy to say 'lower tuition,' but you can't just mandate it. And those colleges are autonomous."

DESPITE his two education assignments, Webb insists, "The real power is in the Appropriations Committee. They have subcommittees on colleges and K-12."

But he says his committees have "excellent working relationships" with two key Appropriations subcommittee chairmen — Democrats William Keith of Garden City and James O'Neill of Saginaw.

The taxation committee assignment, however, was one Webb didn't ask for and didn't relish. Its first order of business was raising the state income tax rate 1.75 percent.

"I don't think anyone expected it to turn out the way it did," he said, referring to nearly party-line votes in both chambers.

THERE WERE discussions of allowing voters to substitute a sales tax for the income tax increase, of using a sales tax hike to achieve property tax reduction, of a host of options.

But the discussions deadlocked over the question of the size of the deficit. "We (Democrats) were convinced we could have sat 'til summer, and we couldn't have got off that deficit. The Republicans took the position, 'You Democrats are going to have to pass the tax package and take the blame for it.' We knew that on a one-party we'd have to unite."

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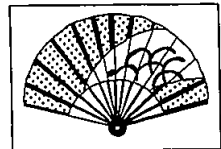
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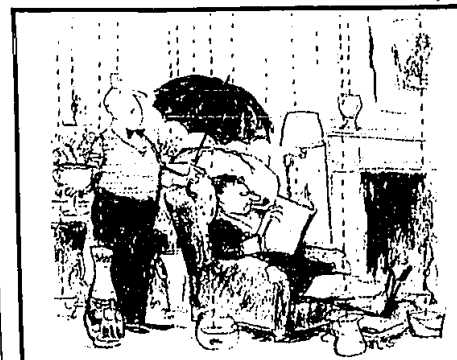
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