

Welfare battle ends in Senate compromise

By Tim Richard
staff writer

After taking a bad defeat in the Appropriations Committee Wednesday, state Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, who lost the committee battle, added Doug Cruce, R-Troy: "We hope it is the beginning of a new emphasis."

They supported the bill on final passage, as did Democrats William Faust of Westland, Jack Faxon of Southfield, Philip Mastin of Pontiac and Patrick McCollough of Dearborn. Not voting was Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Union Lake.

The bill goes back to the House for concurrence in amendments.

THE 33-3 victory belied the earlier battle in the Appropriations Committee. There, Dr. Agnes M. Mansour, the former nun from Farmington Hills and Detroit who heads the Blanchard Administration's Department of Social Services, made an impassioned plea for removal of conservative amendments.

She won and Geake lost in committee, but the final version reflected a compromise Geake and Cruce pointed to these changes in direction:

- \$43 million, which the House had earmarked for a home-heating plan and Mansour wanted for benefit increases, was put into a job-training fund.
- A cash-on-hand contingency account was set up. Legislators contended the administration is overestimating future welfare caseloads. The bill requires approval of a fund transfer by the House and Senate appropriations committees before Mansour's DSS can spend the money.
- A longer waiting period for welfare applicants who have moved into the state in the previous six months. Democrats and some Republicans fear, however, that this may violate federal guidelines.

THE ISSUES were sharply outlined in a committee debate. Advocating tighter rules were Geake and conservative Democrat Gilbert DeNello of East Detroit. Opposing the changes were Mansour and Democrats Faxon of Southfield and Lana Pollack of Ann Arbor.

Mansour advocated a benefit increase: "Is \$5 a day too much . . . to pay for everything? Look at the whole budget. I'd sacrifice anything . . . to get a 5 percent increase for people who have been frozen since 1979."

Geake: "If a Michigan family of four gets \$492 a month — plus food stamps, plus medicare — how do they arrive at a figure of \$315 a month in Indiana?"

"Benefits in Michigan are no longer higher than the five-state average," shot back Pollack. "Indeed, we are lower. But does it make a difference? I'm not sure it does. . . . And I don't hear anyone in this Legislature arguing for parity with what the Indiana Legislature is paid. They have different pay structures and different standards of living."

MANSAUR opposed an amendment that would have forbade higher benefits to persons on welfare who have more children. "To put in boilerplate (legal language) that a woman should not have a child if she's on public assistance is blatant social control."

And Faxon likened the proposal to maintain China and Singapore laws which penalize additional children. "I don't think that's going to impact on whether they're born or not," said Faxon of the GOP amendment.

Geake replied: "We're not saying they can't have a child. We're saying that if a woman on welfare has more children, we should not have to pay. When the taxpayer has another child, no one increases his pay. Only when the welfare recipient has another child do we increase benefits."

DeNello added, "When my people are working for less wages and have to pay for your liberalism, Sens. Faxon and Pollack, we have to take another look at it."

The "China amendment," as Pollack dubbed it, was ultimately rejected when fellow conservatives deserted Geake.

REPUBLICANS sought to eliminate general assistance — a benefit to able-bodied adults, usually single men, who are ineligible for any other assistance — during the three summer months, thus saving \$40.5 million.

Geake contended, "Pennsylvania has this now. It's working very well."

Pollack argued back, "It would work, 1) only if there are jobs and, 2) people refuse to work. Well, there are no jobs for the majority of these people. Keeping them (payments) low in order to encourage them to go back to work isn't valid. Where are the jobs? Show me the want ads and the employers. If you do, I'll retreat."

The GOP amendment lost.

Republicans were successful in extending the waiting period, although one of their leaders, Sen.

Harry Gast of St. Joseph, and Senate Majority Leader William Faust of Westland argued it couldn't be done under federal guidelines. The federal government matches the state welfare contribution, making the total social services budget \$4.1 billion.

THE PARTIES disagreed on whether people were actually moving into Michigan to collect high welfare benefits.



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—Sen. R. Robert Geake

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—Dr. Agnes M. Mansour

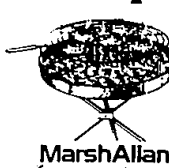


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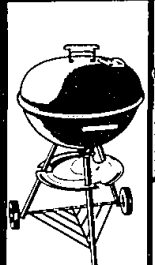
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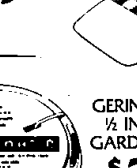
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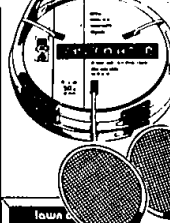
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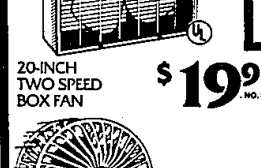
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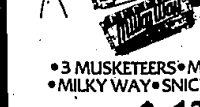
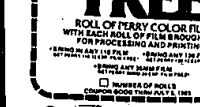
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