

# 'Workfare OK'd; home heating aid increased

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

The Michigan Legislature settled a months-long argument about what to do with \$45 million in the state welfare budget with "a true compromise."

"No one was completely happy," said state Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville.

The compromise gave Republicans half a loaf — "workfare" — House Democrats got the other half a loaf — an increase in home heating aid to welfare recipients.

Only loser was Agnes Mary Mansour,

director of the Department of Social Services, who had sought the \$45 million for higher welfare benefits. Her boss, Gov. James J. Blanchard, agreed to the compromise.

THE COMPROMISE came when the Senate gave 25-9 approval to Senate Bill 416.

All Observer & Eccentric area senators supported it: Republican Geake, Doug Cruce of Troy and Richard Fessler of Union Lake; and Democrats William Faust of Westland, Jack Faxon of Southfield, Philip O. Mastin of Pontiac and Patrick McCollough of Dearborn.

A conservative Democrat who op-

**Workfare covers 'employable, able-bodied recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and General Assistance.' Those who refused work or training would lose three months benefits.**

posed it was Gilbert DiNello of East Detroit. He argued that the "compromise" actually was tipped 60-40 in favor of liberals who wanted more money for home heating.

While the \$45 million of state money was split \$20 million-plus for "workfare" and \$22 million-plus for home heating, DiNello said, the use of federal funds changed the outcome. The federal government will provide only \$5 million for "workfare" but a hefty \$15.5 million for home heating.

Adding federal and state funds gave \$25 million to "workfare" and \$38 mil-

lion to heating aid.

"I see this bill as a very poor compromise or one heavily weighted in favor of those who want increased state spending," DiNello protested.

BUT GEAKE said he had spent the summer working out the compromise in a bipartisan ad hoc committee that included Senate Minority Leader Harry Gast of St. Joseph, Appropriations Chairman James DeSana, D-Wyandotte, and Lana Pollock, D-Ann Arbor.

Geake and Gast were co-authors of the "workfare" idea. "It gives them

(welfare recipients) the alternatives of going to school or community service work," he said.

"Some critics said the utilities were the chief winners, and to a certain extent that's true," said Geake. "But I still supported it because of the workfare component."

Cruce said the final bill gives \$13 million to a Michigan Community Service Corps, \$8 million to job training programs and \$1 million in incentives to private employers to hire welfare recipients.

Geake said the plan covers "employable, able-bodied recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and General Assistance." Those who refused work or training would lose three months benefits.

Excluded would be children, single parents with young children, persons over 55, the disabled and those caring for a disabled relative.

McCOLLOUGH, meanwhile, was elated at the 34-0 passage of his SB 456, a companion measure which permits General Assistance funds to be paid directly to employers of welfare recipients.

"The state is telling employers in Michigan that the money we pay welfare recipients we will now give to the employer if he or she will hire the recipient and provide work and on-the-job training for at least six months," said McCollough.

He added the bill prevents employers from laying off regular employees to hire welfare clients. "We do not want to remove those presently working from their jobs, but rather try to help employers create additional positions for those otherwise on welfare."

He called the companion measures "the legislature's first, solid attempt to end sit-at-home, dead-end welfare programs."

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"This will help us avoid duplication of programs," said trustee Mary Breen, who moved that Schoolcraft adopt the

policy. "It will avoid eliminating small programs that have few students."

The board adopted the new policy unanimously.

UNDER IT, a student would register at Schoolcraft and, when necessary, take a needed course at (say) Oakland Community College. At OCC, he would be charged the in-district rate rather than non-resident tuition.

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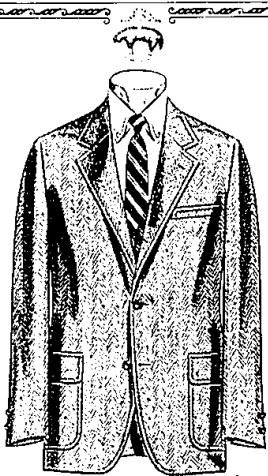
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