

'Special treatment' for schools

Blanchard asks Ford, Lodge freeway repairs

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Education is the lone "untouchable," the single sacred cow in Gov. James J. Blanchard's budget for his second year in office.

"In my zero (increase) budget, I am proposing that education be singled out for special treatment," the 41-year-old chief executive told the Michigan Legislature Wednesday evening in his State of the State Message.

In other areas the state's first Democratic governor in 20 years will cut state employment through attrition, create a second Youth Corps for summer jobs and continue support of an equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

AS EXPECTED, Blanchard proposed an early rollback of last year's temporary 1.75 percent hike in the state personal income tax — but only if the Legislature exercises "tough-as-nails spending discipline."

The temporary tax rate declined by 0.25 percent Jan. 1 and is scheduled to decline another 0.25 percent the first day of 1985, but Blanchard's budget could "accelerate that rollback." — to Oct. 1 of this year — a tax cut of almost \$130 million.

For the metropolitan Detroit area, Blanchard said he would announce "specific rehabilitation programs for Michigan's expressways," including major reconstruction of the Edsel Ford and John Lodge freeways in Detroit.

The governor left Oakland County supporters of an M-275 and Northwestern Highway extension guessing. "This administration does not stress new construction," he said, but added he would ask the Department of Transportation to prepare a long-range plan for a few new freeways by April 30.



Gov. James J. Blanchard
"tough as nails"

He made no mention of granting the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority power to levy an operating tax of its own, or even of power to go to the voters for money.

WITHOUT RELEASING any numbers, Blanchard said he will propose nearly an 8 percent increase in state aid to K-12 schools and a 10 percent hike to the 13 state universities — "if they will freeze their tuition."

Otherwise, universities will be in for only a 6 percent increase, he said. He made no mention of community college tuition.

But Blanchard sent out a confusing message on his plan to create a scholarship fund aiding 5,000 "high achieving" high school graduates who plan to attend college in Michigan.

In his speech to legislators, Blanchard said it would serve students "primarily from families of ordinary means." But in the detailed text of his

40-page message, he said the grants will go to students "regardless of financial means."

In a pre-speech briefing, press secretary Rick Cole there was "some discrepancy in wording" but couldn't elaborate.

Blanchard deplored the state's 50th ranking in increasing appropriations for higher education in the last three years, blaming it for a nearly 60 percent increase in tuitions from 1978 to '82. "The dramatic increase in tuition shifted a greater share of the burden of college costs onto students and their families," he said.

IN ADDITION, Blanchard proposed an eight-point program for education generally, lifting many points from a set of recommendations recently adopted by the independently elected State Board of Education. The points:

1. Computers: "By 1988 every student in our state will have access to a computer and the skills to use it," he

said, likening the program to the federal Apollo space project. His budget will have grants to increase the use of computers in classrooms and to train teachers and administrators in their use.

2. Fundamentals: "In my view every Michigan high school graduate should have at least four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, three years of social science, history and government, a half year of computer science and, particularly for college-bound students, two years of a foreign language."

3. Scholarships: Cole said in a press briefing that this would be "a new, free-standing program" and not a repackaging of other state scholarship programs that have been unfunded.

4. Technology: "We will use cable television specifically to help us improve the teaching of math and science."

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