

# House dumps special election on abortion

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

No April 6 election on abortions for Michigan voters.  
Maybe a special election later. Maybe not at all.  
A deeply split state House of Representatives failed Tuesday to muster a two-thirds majority to put an anti-abortion constitutional amendment on the spring ballot.  
The House decision set in motion a 10-member special joint committee to wrestle with the long-debated question.

"IT'S ABSOLUTELY ridiculous that we're (thinking of) calling a special election on an issue that's been debated 14 years," said Rep. Michael Hayes, R-Midland, summing up the thinking of many frustrated lawmakers.  
But Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, author of the failed resolution, said he expects to be appointed to the special committee and favors a special election — "the sooner the better."

After the Senate voted two weeks ago to call the special election on Geake's proposed constitutional amendment, the House Tuesday rejected it 58-44, with 74 votes needed for adoption.

Male legislators favored the election 56-33. Females were opposed, 11-2 — a pattern that has held up on most votes aimed at cutting Medicaid abortion funding.

Here's how Observer & Eccentric lawmakers voted:

• Yes (5) — Mat Dunaskiss, R-Lake Orion; Gregory Gruse, R-Madison Heights; James Kosteva, D-Canton; Gerald Law, R-Plymouth.  
• No (7) — Lyn Banks, R-Livonia; Justine Barnes, D-Westland; Maxine Berman, D-Southfield; Judith Miller, R-Birmingham; W.V. Brotherton, R-Farmington; William

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Keith, D-Garden City; Gordon Sparks, R-Troy.  
• Absent — John Bennett, D-Redford. (Because 74 yes votes are needed, Bennett's absence was the equivalent of a no vote.)

APRIL 6 was proposed for a special election because many cities hold local elections that day.

Earlier in what was supposed to be the final meeting of the year, the House voted 64-39 to adopt a \$1 billion Medicaid budget.

The Senate, however, passed a different version of the budget. A special session is likely to be necessary to clarify the budget bill.

The compromise plan, if adopted, would have:

• Funded non-medical services, such as nursing homes, for the full fiscal year, ending next Sept. 30.  
• Funded Medicaid services, including abortions for welfare recipients only until March 31.

• Set up a special committee of five senators and five representatives to probe a series of questions.

AMONG THE questions are:

• "Should the issue of public funding of abortions be placed before voters?" House Speaker Gary Owen, D-Ypsilanti, a strong "pro-choice" vote, agrees with Geake, a "pro-life" vote, that voters should decide the question, but disagrees on

from the state, colleges or local units — for abortions for employees under health insurance packages.

• "What have been the consequences of prohibiting public funding for abortions in states where such a prohibition has been instituted?" Pro-choice and pro-life forces agree that in such states the number of Medicaid abortions has dropped only about 20-25 percent.

Reason: The cutoffs have affected only the surgical cost, which is about one-third the total cost, so in effect two-thirds of the total is still picked up by Medicaid. The Geake proposal, however, aims to cut off the hospital care portion, too.

"THIS IS THE first time Right to Life (anti-abortion group) has shown any interest in a ballot proposition," said Speaker Owen. "It's a significant change in interest group participation."

"This sanctions another 8,000 abortions between now and March 31," said a bitter Rep. Fred Dillingham, R-Fowlerville, who opposed the compromise measure. Dillingham, who becomes a state senator next year, was author of an anti-abortion amendment to the Medicaid

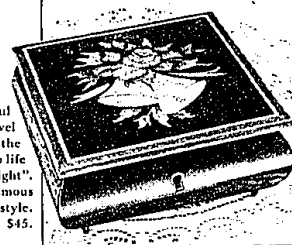
budget earlier in the year.

Rep. Thomas Power, R-Traverse City, was an anti-abortion member who nevertheless voted against calling a special election.

"The cost of a special election is \$5 million to \$10 million, which is more than we spend on abortion anyway," said Power, objecting that special election turnouts are too low.

Power's amendment to place the proposal on the 1988 general election ballot went down, 40 yes to 59 no.

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