

# Oakland reps hit Blanchard housing plan

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Gov. James J. Blanchard flooded the 1989 Michigan Legislature with new proposals, most calling for little new money in a tight budget.

"A smorgasbord," said House Republican leader Paul Hildebrand of Holland.

"An English garden — not a formal French garden — full of variety and changes, a little chaotic," said Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills.

Lawmakers liked the sound of the educational proposals in Blanchard's seventh State of the State address Tuesday, but many were repelled by an investment plan to aid first-time homebuyers.

"IT'S FINANCIALLY a losing proposition to save money for a home if you can purchase it now," said Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, who thinks he has a better idea.

Under Blanchard's plan, a prospective first-time home buyer would invest a portion of each paycheck in a state savings bond and in five years would be guaranteed enough for a down payment. It's called HOST — Home Ownership Savings Trust.

But Cruce figures the price of a house will inflate 25 percent in the meantime. "You do better to purchase now than waiting to save. My proposal is to make loans today to first-time home buyers," Cruce said.

The second-term senator would raise \$18 million by doubling the house transfer tax, create a revolving fund, and make what would amount to second-mortgage loans that would be repaid in a lump sum at 4 percent interest.

TWO REPUBLICAN representatives saw no merit to HOST.

"It's P.R.," said Matt Danakiss of Lake Orion. "He should work on reducing property taxes. Then they can afford to buy a home. One reason people don't qualify for mortgages is high property taxes."

"It distresses me," said Judith Miller of Birmingham, "that the state is going to guarantee the difference between the investment and the down payment on a house. It's like MET (the pre-paid tuition plan), which is not one of my favorites."

"Where's the money coming from?"

"I'm very interested in the home plan," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield. "It could do a lot of people a great amount of good."

Not all Republicans were opposed to HOST, however. Sen. Nick Smith of Hillsdale County said Blanchard's plan is similar to one he introduced last year. "I'm glad to see the governor finally agree. This signals a very interesting change of attitude on the part of the Blanchard administration," Smith said.

BERMAN PRAISED Blanchard's Job Start proposal. It would end general assistance welfare to able-bodied people aged 18-25 and pay them \$200 a month plus medical benefits



Gov. James J. Blanchard audience is national

to either complete high school, get job training, get into a job search program or do community service jobs.

The goal is to reduce general assistance from 21,000 to 12,000 by the

third year, said Pat Babcock, director of social services.

"You're not going on general assistance — you'll pay you. It's a wonderful way to go," said Herman.

She said the administration's new job card program — with all jobs and training listed in a state computer — was identical to a program she proposed in her first term.

Miller said Job Start is "basically what we recommended in our welfare task force. He knows a good idea when he sees it."

ON THE EDUCATION front, Faxon saw "nothing extraordinarily new." Most people agree the preschool program is something that should continue.

Of the quality programs, Faxon said, "We (legislators) have been writing in requirements for high school graduation. He's embellishing this with standards."

But the veteran senator was cooler to Blanchard's heralded \$50 million plan to "double the number of computers in Michigan schools — a computer for every classroom, making Michigan No. 1 in the nation in educational technology."

"The governor loves technology," said Faxon. "He has a deep and abiding respect for the best new gadget on the block. But at what expense? What are the alternatives?"

"Many of us believe reading requires books. Adequate texts. An investment in libraries can be cost effective."

"It seems to me the governor looks at schools too much in terms of a work force," said Faxon, emphasizing his own values of a liberal education and citizen participation.

"I ask employers what they need, and they say honesty — integrity —

reliability — dependability. I haven't heard up front about the ability to use a machine."

A CHILD HEALTH plan received warm praise from Berman, who received a briefing from Raj Wiener, director of public health.

Wiener said child death causes would be studied to determine factors in high-risk pregnancies. Programs to aid parenting skills — such as nutrition and how to discipline properly — will be offered. Wiener also said violence has been shown to be a major cause of death for minority boys.

Berman said, "The department is trying for a decline in death rates of children. It is not a costly program."

Blanchard's address was pared to 25 minutes in order to accommodate CSPAN, a national public affairs cable TV channel. Unlike 1988, when Blanchard brought out football players from Rose Bowl champion Michigan State University, this year he didn't mention the University of Michigan's Rose Bowl victory. It indicated he was seeking a national audience for his theme that "Michigan today is a job-making machine that is the envy of the nation."

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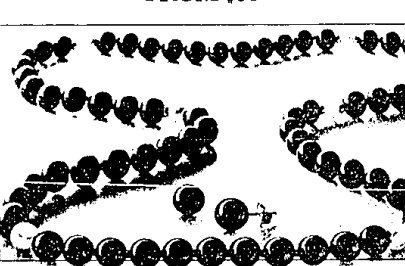


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