

House appointment draws praise, questions

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Two Republicans praised the appointment of state Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, as chairman of the House Colleges and Universities Committee. But one expressed surprise at Speaker Lewis Dodak's choice.

"He isn't on the committee," said Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, "and he doesn't have any colleges in his district."

"But I'll enjoy working with Jim Kosteva," said Bankes, noting the committee had been inactive because previous chairman Dennis Dutko, D-Warren, had been fighting drunk driving charges. Dutko is now serving a jail sentence.

Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham, praised the selection of Kosteva because "he's fair. He's well organized. He runs a good meeting. And he's a friend."

SPEAKER DODAK recently removed the troubled Dutko from all four of his House committee assignments, giving his one chairmanship to Kosteva.

Kosteva, 37, is a third-term lawmaker and community planner by profession who had not previously been a member of that eight-member committee.

"I am one of the highest seniority

Some members of the Colleges and Universities Committee say it has a difficult job because those institutions claim autonomy whenever lawmakers seem to intrude on their boards' policymaking authority.

members without a committee chairmanship or a seat on the Appropriations Committee," said Kosteva in an interview from Lansing. "I requested and applied for the appointment."

If unlike most other members, Kosteva has no college or university in his district, he does have his name on college legislation. He was chief sponsor of the Michigan Education Trust, the pre-paid college tuition investment program.

KOSTEVA HAS been close to the Democratic leadership in the House and has a number of other major committee posts: Taxation; Conservation, Recreation and Environment, where he chairs a solid waste subcommittee; Education; Transportation; Urban Affairs; and the Capitol Building.

Will he have to give up any of

those posts with his new chairmanship?"

"Not at the present time. Time-wise, there is no conflict, outside of my personal life," he said.

As Bankes said, Dutko hadn't convened the Colleges and Universities more than once or twice this year. The question is: What does it do?

It doesn't allocate money — that job belongs to the higher education subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. It doesn't pass judgment on tuition increases.

"I WANT TO look at the entire financial aid system," said the new chairman.

"It's a real patchwork quilt. It's difficult (for a student) to access information. We need to see that aid (grants, loans and scholarships) is directed to the right student."

A second priority is to monitor the work of his baby — the MET tuition fund. Here, Kosteva voices some "concern and frustration" at college tuitions which this year are rising at just under 10 percent. "I don't quite understand why university costs rise at such a rate to necessitate these tuition increases."

Gov. James J. Blanchard, for the second year, is expressing his concern, threatening to veto the state appropriations of some unnamed universities whose tuition hikes he considers excessive.

State treasurer Robert Bowman, who invented the MET idea, said it's based on earning 9 percent compound interest a year with the MET fund and tuition hikes of 7 percent or less. While Oakland University's increase is in the 8 percent ballpark, others are much higher: University of Michigan, 9.6; Wayne State, 9.6; Michigan Tech, 9.5; Central Michigan, 9.67; Saginaw Valley, 8.8.

KOSTEVA ALSO wants to take a look at "proprietary schools" — those which teach trades and specific skills. Are regulations realistic? Are they teaching real market skills?

Bankes agrees, citing an unnamed business school whose graduates, after 68 credit hours, received top pay of \$17,000 a year.

Bankes said Kosteva is correct in raising questions about whether some financial aids are going unused.

The most difficult question the panel currently is handling, said Bankes, is the request of Central Michigan and Michigan State to give campus police the same authority as municipal police. "The real question is, should they have guns?" said Bankes.

She and Miller say the Colleges and Universities Committee has a

difficult job because those institutions claim autonomy whenever lawmakers seem to intrude on their boards' policymaking authority. "We can't do an end run around them," said Miller.

They say the panel has, however, put pressure on universities simply by discussing an issue. Best example: the bill to require that college housing applications ask whether a student prefers a non-drinking roommate as well as a non-smoker.

Such a bill failed to pass, but it has prompted all of the state's public universities, except Michigan State University, to put some form of their question on their housing applications for the upcoming school year.



James Kosteva



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