

Even Republicans wary of budget cuts

By Tim Richard
staff writer

On paper, it looked as if House Democrats rejected Gov. John Engler's budget revisions Tuesday on a party-line vote.

In fact, some Republicans, too, had problems with Engler's cuts.

At week's end, leaders of the three factions — the executive office, Republican-led Senate and Democrat-led House — started negotiations on how to close a \$1.1 billion gap in the \$7.4 billion budget.

"There are several items I do not support," said Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, told the Senate Appropriations Committee. He cited Engler's planned closing of the Lafayette Clinic, a mental health service and research facility on the Wayne State University campus.

Less than an hour later, in the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, made almost the identical remark.

"The mental health cuts weren't that bad except for the Lafayette clinic," said Berman, a new member of the Appropriations panel.

THE DIFFERENCE was that they voted party lines.

Geake and six Republicans on the Senate Appropriations Committee gave 7 to 4 approval of Engler's executive order to cut \$265 million in spending. (Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, was absent.)

Berman, Wilfred Webb of Hazel Park and 13 Democrats rejected 15 to 8 most of the budget cuts. Voting to support the Republican governor was Gordon Sparks, R-Troy.

Oak reps gain on panels

State Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, landed a coveted seat on the House Appropriations Committee as she starts her fifth term in Lansing.

And freshman Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield, leaped onto the Taxation Committee as her big assignment. It will take up Gov. John Engler's proposed 20 percent property tax cut.

Appropriations, the committee that allocates money, and Taxation, the panel that raises it, are considered two of the choicest plums in the Legislature.

HOUSE SPEAKER Lewis Dodak, D-Montrose, released his committee appointments Tuesday, fully two months after Senate majority leader Richard Posthumus, R-Alto, made his assignments.

Dodak's action dampened speculation he would hold up committee assignments until after the House votes on whether to accept a 16 percent pay increase proposed by a compensation commission. Dodak favors it.

Berman gave up the chair of the House Elections Committee and a seat on Taxation for the Appropriations assignment.

"I may be sorry," she grinned as her new panel split over budget revisions.

Two other area members, Wilfred Webb, D-Hazel Park, and Gordon Sparks, R-Troy, retained their seats on Appropriations. Both represent portions of Troy.

Appropriations members have so much work that they rarely are given other committee assignments.

HERE'S HOW area members fared in the new lineup:

- Berman — Appropriations
- Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, a freshman — Judiciary (another major plum), Economic Development, Liquor Control
- Dobb — Taxation, Constitution and Women's Issues, Liquor Control, Senior Citizens and Retirement
- Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills — Conservation, Recreation and Environment (one committee), Consumers, House Oversight, Liquor Control
- Thomas Middleton, R-Orionville — Education, Labor, Towns and Counties. Middleton is a freshman in a district that extends to Oakland Township.
- Sparks — Appropriations
- Webb — Appropriations

"I'm voting for it because the House will reject it," said Geake, correctly predicting the other chamber's vote.

Geake had other objections to Engler's cuts:

• Contracts would be eliminated for social services emergency needs.

• Cuts were made in an Arab-Chaldean program of counseling and job-finding services headquartered on Telegraph Road in Southfield.

• Cities hosting horse racing tracks would lose \$3.5 million in state taxes on wagering — about \$900,000 apiece for Livonia, North-

ville and Hazel Park.

In a rare public disagreement, Appropriations Chair Harry Gast, R-St. Joseph, replied to Geake: "I have a couple of communities that want a race track, and they'd be willing to sign a blood oath that they'll never ask for a penny of state subsidy."

DEMOCRATS HAD many objections — Faxon and Lana Pollack of Ann Arbor criticized arts cuts — but the most often used partisan word was "mean-spirited."

House Speaker Lewis Dodak, D-Montrose, unveiled his broad approach to finding \$1.1 billion: taking

one-third from the budget stabilization (rainy day) fund, getting one-third from budget cuts and finding one-third in "short-term strategies" — selling state assets, furloughing employees, giving incentives for early retirement.

Engler's changes, in contrast, showed 10 percent coming from the rainy day fund, 80 percent from budget cuts and 10 percent from short-term strategies.

The Michigan Constitution requires the governor, when revenues appear to be falling short, to make budget cuts and submit them to the

appropriations committees in both chambers. The House panel's rejection killed Engler's executive order. The new governor has 30 days to propose a new plan.

SEN. JOE CONROY, D-Flint, an Appropriations member, was orally beaten up when he said, "If we were to raise our income tax by 1 percent for one year, we would not have a problem."

Countered Dan DeGrow, R-Port Huron: "A 1 percent increase in the income tax would be overwhelmingly defeated."

Said David Holmes, D-Detroit: "I

wouldn't be allowed back in Detroit if I voted for these cuts. As we say in the labor movement, the governor has gone to an extreme in the hope that he'll wind up in the middle."

Replied Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids: "I have trouble every week-end going home to Grand Rapids. They think all the money goes to Detroit."

Democrats concentrated their fire on Engler's plan to cut General Assistance, a welfare program for adults without children, job training for young adults on GA and AFDC and mental health layoffs.

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