

Area lawmakers view speech along party lines

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Legislation to implement Gov. John Engler's promised reduction in property taxes is due this week, according to State Sen. David M. Honigman, R-West Bloomfield.

"I plan to introduce it this week," Honigman said Tuesday, about 12 hours after Engler again promised property tax reduction — this time in his State of the State message delivered Monday in Lansing.

Honigman and other Republicans were pleased with Engler's message, showing their pleasure with frequent, resounding applause.

Democrats, in sharp contrast, were quiet through most of the 25-minute speech. Their applause was polite and less-than-enthusiastic.

"It was very divisive," said State Rep. Maxine Berman of Southfield.

"He tried to portray anyone who doesn't agree with him as being bad for Michigan or anti-jobs," she said.



"He tried to shove his opponents (mostly Democrats) into a corner."

"But in politics, when you shove, people shove back," only harder," said Berman, recently appointed to the powerful House Appropriations Committee.

HONIGMAN said he is proud to be implementing Engler's promise and is ready to support it through the Legislature.

"It definitely includes provisions for the state to replace or make up school revenue lost because of the cut in property taxes," said Honigman.

Honigman, a former state representative, said he was impressed with other parts of Engler's address as well. "I also like the idea of schools of choice," he said. "That would bring competition into education, and it would force schools to improve."

"Educational choice is so fundamental. I don't know why we haven't had it all these years," Honigman said. "Educators who oppose it seem to think they are better equipped to decide what's good for others. That's nonsense."

"People do better when they have free choice, and that goes for education as well," Honigman said.

Prior to the address, his first since he became governor by defeating incumbent James Blanchard in November, Engler said it was not meant as a blueprint for the coming year.

Butter, he said, it was meant as a broad statement of policy, with details for specific proposals — like education — to come later.

State Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington, said the new governor made clear his intentions of delivering on campaign promises. "He said he was going to downsize government," Dolan said. "And that's what he's going to do."

Dolan said she is particularly encouraged by what she interpreted as a promise by Engler to make government more accountable.

"PROGRAMS WILL BE evaluated to see if they are achieving their goals," said Dolan. "If they aren't working, they should be changed or eliminated."

Dolan said she believes Engler is concerned about education. "But I want to see how Farmington and other out-of-formula (affluent) school districts are going to be affected by the cut in property taxes," Rep. Gordon Sparks, R-Troy, said.

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— Rep. Maxine Berman
D-Southfield

'It definitely includes provisions for the state to replace or make up school revenue lost because of the cut in property taxes.'

— Sen. David Honigman
R-West Bloomfield



budgets. "But I know the governor wants good schools. I'll just have to trust that schools won't be hurt."

Rep. Michael Bouchard praised Engler's address for changing the focus of government. "It's no longer a question of if we make cuts, but where."

The Birmingham Republican endorses the property tax cut. "As I understand it, the state will make up any lost revenue — that's, who we're cutting in company areas."

Freshman State Rep. Robert Lobb, R-West Bloomfield, does not see Engler's address as overly "positive" — except to support it.

"I like the idea of a working state government and making education the state's number one priority. That's the way it should be," Lobb said.

STATE SEN. Mark D. ...

The 1997 workshops are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on four Saturdays beginning March 2. The last dates are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 6. Tuition is \$150, including materials.

Additional information is available at 376-3129.

OU offers test prep

Oakland University Division of Continuing Education is again offering preparation workshops for those getting ready to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

The workshops for the SAT will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Feb. 23 and March 2, and from 9 a.m. to noon on

March 9. Tuition is \$150, including materials.

The GRE workshops are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on four Saturdays beginning March 2. The last dates are from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 6. Tuition is \$150, including materials.

Additional information is available at 376-3129.

Local legislators move on Engler's proposals

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

State senators from Oakland County have been active this week as Gov. John Engler moves to implement his much-heralded property tax reform.

Republican senators David Honigman, Doug Cruse and Mat Dunaskis each introduced bills designed to cut or curtail property taxes as an intricate part of Engler's reform package.

Honigman, of West Bloomfield, introduced a bill to reduce the percentage of market value that can be used to determine tax liability. Currently, homes and businesses are taxed on 50 percent of their market value. Honigman's measure would reduce that to 40 percent.

Over three years under Honigman's bill, property valued at \$200,000 — and taxed on \$100,000 (or 50 percent of market value) — would be taxed on \$80,000 (or 40 percent of market value).

Honigman's bill would also cap the millage assessed for school purposes at 30 (compared with 35.4 mills, the average school rate in Oakland County) and exempt all seniors from having to pay it.

CRUSE OF TROY introduced a bill that would limit reassessments to once every two years while restricting increases to a maximum of 5 percent. Assessments are a major component of the total tax liability and no reform is complete without addressing them.

The Cruse measure is timely, because some Oakland County property owners this week were notified of new assessments. Some were up by 50 percent or more.

Dunaskis introduced legislation that guarantees the ability of Downtown Development Authorities like the one in Rochester — to market bonds, even with a 20 percent reduction in property taxes.

The goal is to guarantee the financial structure of authorities seeking to revitalize downtowns, said the Lake Orion Republican.

While Engler and the Republicans are excited about cutting property taxes, one Oakland County Democrat is less optimistic — not because he doesn't want tax reform, but because the state is already in a financial crisis.

"EVERYBODY WANTS cuts in property taxes," said Sen. Jack Favron, D-Farmington Hills. "But the state has already made budget cuts (2 percent from last year). Anything further would endanger our fiscal integrity."

Additional cuts would be like taking away life support systems from an already sick patient," Favron said Wednesday.

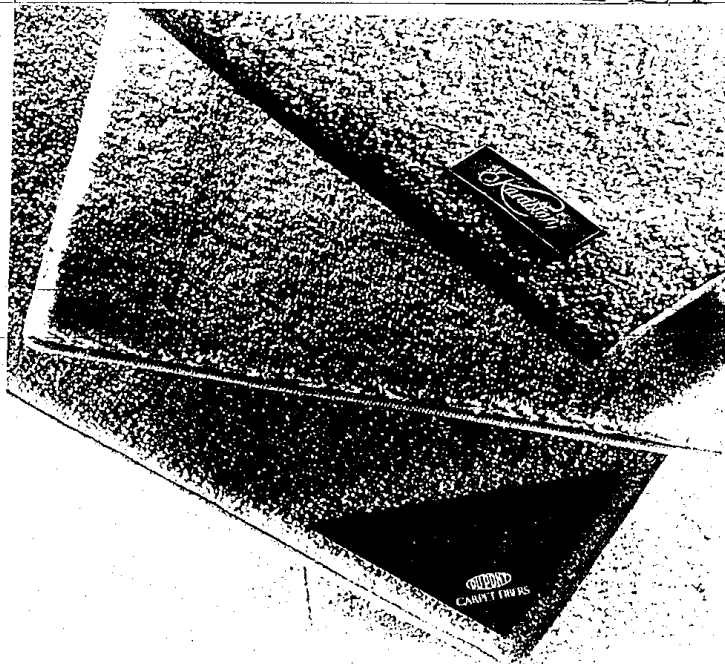
Seedlings offered

Orders for seedlings are being taken by the Oakland County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Species available this year are: red, white, Scotch and Austrian pines; Norway and Colorado blue and white spruce; Douglas and Colorado firs and white cedar. Also available are: black walnut, hybrid poplar, white birch, sugar maple, red oak, autumn olive and redbud dogwood.

Packets on birds, shade nut and hardwood trees are also available. Order blanks are available at the district's Clarkson office, 7151 Dr. tonville Road, Suite 205 or by calling 620-0863.

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