

Tax base sharing

Bill to capture business growth gathers steam

By Tim Richards
staff writer

State Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, wore a black arm band on the House floor Thursday.

The second-term lawmaker held up a black bandit's mask and offered it to Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City. "There should be give and take. There's only take. That's not fair," she said.

Her GOP colleague from the other side of the metropolis, William Bryant of Grosse Pointe, called it the "sheriff of Nottingham bill," a companion to last year's "Robin Hood" school aid bill.

The topic was tax base sharing — taking half the growth in business property taxes and spreading it to all schools.

THE TONE was unusually bitter as a coalition of Democrats and rural Republicans advanced their own version of a plan to use commercial and industrial property taxes from growth areas — mainly outlying suburbs in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties — to sweeten the school funding pot.

The bill is on a fast track. It emerged suddenly from the House Taxation Committee with an hour's dis-

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cussion and no staff analysis.

Although it wasn't on the House calendar, it was pushed through second reading Thursday and could be passed as early as Tuesday.

House Bill 4267 has some technical differences from a Senate-passed version, which was part of the school aid bill. The House bill sets up two districts instead of three. The House bill's first-year impact would be \$23 in per-pupil aid for the poorest districts versus \$30 in the Senate version.

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KEITH, A FORMER Garden City school board member and a chief proponent of tax base sharing, was

nearly as adamant that districts like Inkster are the real victims of Michigan's "King John" taxation policies.

"They're sharing not their tax base but their future growth," Keith said to lawmakers from the growth suburbs.

"Some districts levy 18 to 20 mills. Others levy 40 mills to get the same amount of money."

"Bloomfield Hills levies only 23 mills and raises \$4,000 per pupil. Inkster passed 8 new mills last year and raises half as much."

In 1990 Keith was architect of a plan to "recapture" \$72 million in categorical aid from wealthier districts, a measure called the "Robin Hood law." It cost Dolan's home district \$5.8 million. Other suburbs also lost millions.

"We shouldn't be playing Robin

Hood," Keith said. "We shouldn't have been sending \$6 million to Bloomfield Hills in the first place."

"If this is a Robin Hood approach, they (wealthier suburbs) must be King John," he said.

KEITH SAID bluntly his goal is to end all categorical programs and put the money into the general school aid formula, aiding poorer districts.

"Today we're putting half the money into categorical and half into school aid," he said.

The goal of Keith and like-minded lawmakers is to reduce the gap between the state's richest districts (\$8,400 per pupil) and poorest (less than \$2,500).

He, Rep. James O'Neill, D-Saginaw, and Sen. Dan DeCrow, R-Port Huron, say it's impossible to raise state taxes to pump more into state school aid. The only way to close the gap, they argue, is to spread local resources.

BRYANT SAID tax base sharing will cost a few districts a lot of money but spread "a measly \$14 million this year" to poorer districts.

The veteran GOP leader said that if Lansing can raid half the local business tax base this year, next year it may raid all the business tax base, and the year after it may start taking residential tax base.

Bryant found an irony in the tax bill: "This doesn't affect Bridgman (one of the wealthiest districts in the state, with its nuclear power plant). It operates on allocated millage."

His point was that tax base sharing affects only new growth, not old wealth.

around Oakland

Blood drive on July 5th

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OCC board meeting Tuesday

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