

House bill won't take more from rich schools

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Robin Hood's loot wasn't any less this year, but it wasn't greater — and suburban school districts can breathe a short sigh of relief.

The state House of Representatives Tuesday passed a \$3 billion school aid bill that still "reduces" \$72 million in categorical aid from wealthier districts, the same as the current year. As proposed last winter, the recapture would have been \$100 million.

"There were no new Robin Hoods — no additional Robin Hoods for the first time in six years," said Rick Simonson, lobbyist for Oakland County schools. He summed up the attitude of out-of-ordinary districts (those which get no general state aid but have seen their categorical aid chipped away):

"We couldn't be happier with retention of FICA (Social Security payments)," said Simonson, interviewed in the lobby outside the House chamber.

May votes revealing

Representatives voted 94-11 with four absent to approve a different version of the Senate-passed bill.

EDUCATION

As usual, the differences will have to be ironed out in a conference committee of three senators and three representatives. It's the panel that really writes Michigan's public school aid bill.

The 11 nay votes also tell who gets hit hardest by the existing Robin Hood provisions: Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia; Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake; Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills; John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Township; and Gordon Sparks, R-Troy, from the Observer & Eccentric area.

Other negative votes came from Warren (2), St. Clair Shores, Grand Blanc, Traverse City and West Branch.

"Oakland County still loses \$31 million," said Dobb, the first-term lawmaker from Oakland's Inland area. "That's almost half the total in the state. There's still too much Robin Hood."

Missing the roll call was John Bennett, D-Helford.

Gov. John Engler had sought to take away all state Social Security and retirement payments, preferring to put the money in the general

aid pot "so school districts can spend it as they see fit."

Thus, the House version, like the Senate's, was another defeat for Engler and a bipartisan group who want to narrow drastically the spending gap between the poorest (\$2,500) and richest (nearly \$9,000) districts.

Adult ed funds

The House spent most of the afternoon on the relatively minor issue of funding adult education. Simonson was pleased with the result.

Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City, who 60-42 approval of his amendment to continue emphasizing adult ed funding on enrollment and attendance at the first two classes.

The appropriations subcommittee had sought to shift payments to the basis of "outcomes." Keith's restoration of the status quo was denounced by one of his closest political friends, Rep. James O'Neill, D-Saginaw. O'Neill said "unethical and unprofessional" administrators sign up anyone they can just to get state money.

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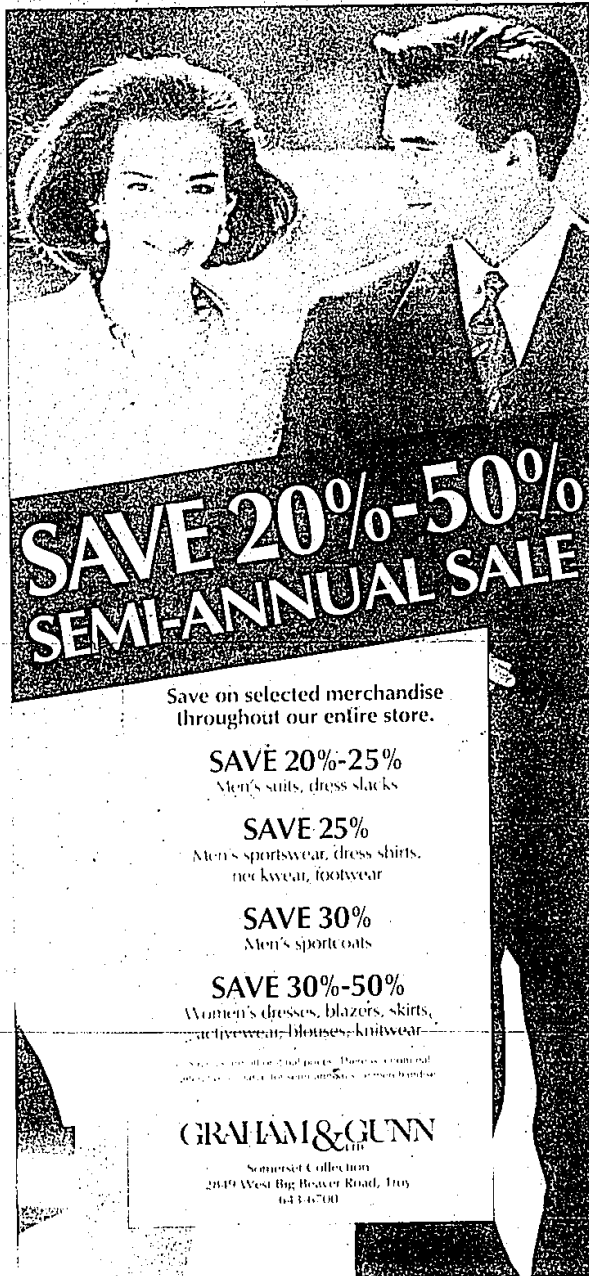
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