

New legislators cast conservative votes

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Michigan's Legislature is likely to turn more conservative after the 1998 election.

That's when term limitation takes effect under a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 1992.

"No person shall be elected to the office of state representative more than three times. No person shall be elected to the office of state Senate more than two times," says the new section.

The conclusion that the Legislature will become more conservative is based on this newspaper's study of voting patterns on three key school finance reform measures.

Senators serving three or more terms — who would be ineligible to serve if term limitation were in effect today — cast a total of 83 yes and 11 no votes, or 75 percent in favor.

Senators in their first two terms

cast a total of 29 yes and 31 no, just 48 percent in favor.

In the House, all three bills received the bare 56 minimum for passage and either 44 or 45 against.

House members serving four or more terms — who would be ineligible if term limitation were in effect today — voted 38 to 8, 34 to 12 and 36 to 13 in favor. Their favorable percentages were 83, 74 and 73.5, respectively.

Members in their first three terms voted 17 to 37, 22 to 32 and 20 to 31. Their favorable percentages were 31, 41 and 39 respectively.

The bills used for analysis were House Bills 5109, raising the single business tax by 0.4 percent to 2.75; HB 5110, the real estate transfer tax; and HB 5111, establishing a statewide property tax collection authority.

Measures that passed overwhelmingly, that didn't focus on taxes or that required more than a simple majority were not

used. Amendments also were discarded.

The findings were no surprise. Supporters of term limitation said it would remove people who had become part of "the system."

They said it would bring in people closer to their constituents and to non-governmental jobs.

Party affiliation appeared to be a less important factor than how long a lawmaker had served in Lansing.

In the Senate, 12 to 13 Republicans and eight to nine Democrats passed the measures.

In the House, each party put up 28 votes to make 56-vote majorities.

Party leaders like Sen. Dick Posthumus (R-fourth term), Sen. Art Miller (D-fifth term), Speaker Paul Hildebrand (R-eighth term) and Curtis Hortel (D-seven terms) voted for every bill.

But freshman Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, voted against two of the three measures. First and second term Republi-

cans Reps. Penny Criseman of Rochester, John Jamian of Bloomfield Township, Greg Kaza of Rochester Hills.

Other factors were at work to assure more yes votes from senior lawmakers.

Party leaders trade votes. For example, Senate Democratic chiefs promised to "put up" eight votes if Republicans put up 12. Junior members have the privilege of voting no to look good back home and get re-elected.

Veteran lawmakers have less reason to fear the wrath of voters because of long service records and name recognition.

Junior members frequently vote no to "send a message" to their elders that they are unhappy at not being consulted in deals.

Junior members complain they haven't had time to read lengthy bills before voting on them. Criseman of Rochester made that complaint during the mid-year budget process. A freshman member of the House Taxation Committee

drew the wrath of a senior member, who said, "I've never seen anyone abstain so often."

Here is how other Observer & Eccentric-area lawmakers voted: Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills (six terms) — missed all three votes while performing in the "Nutcracker" ballet in Detroit. Faxon's absence is the equivalent of voting no.

Sen. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield (first term) — yes on SBT and real estate transfer, missed property tax vote.

Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield (fifth term) — no on SBT, yes on others.

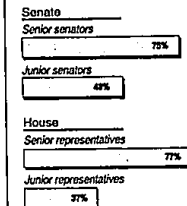
Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake (second term) — yes on all three.

Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills (third term) — yes on all three.

Rep. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak (eighth term) — yes on all three.

Voting patterns

How many terms a person has been in office is a more important determinant of how the legislator voted on school tax bills than political party. This chart shows the percentage of favorable votes cast on three bills: Raising the single business tax, the real estate transfer tax and establishing a statewide tax collection authority.



Source: Observer & Eccentric Research
THE OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS

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