Vote to dissolve Detroit school board splits state House

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Lawmakers and the public are
deeply divided as the state
House of Representatives this
week heads for a showdown vote
on a bill to dissolve the Detroit
Board of Education and hand the
reins to Mayor Dennis Archer.
"We reported out the bill on a
party-line vote," said Rep. Paul
DeWeese, R.-Williamston, a
member of the House Education.
"But it will take more than than
that."

party-line vote," DeWeese recalled, 'but it got Democratic votes on the Senate floor (22 Republicans and eight Democratic).

DeWeese predicted there would be a lot of negotiating by time the full House votes this week. He said he had spent a day with a Detroit lawmaker looking for common ground on the politically-charged issue. Democrats, for example, want amendments giving the city council approval over the mayor's five appointments, retaining four of the current school board members, and an immediate citywide vote on the takeover plan.

Here are some of the cross-currents agitating the House:

Suburban and outstate leaders aren't entirely convinced that taking over the Detroit board and allowing it to hiro new tog-executives is a safe solution.

"The dissolution of a school board is serious," William Wright, Lenawee County's assistant superintendent for finance, told the House panel. This is somewhat of a slam-dunk approach to politics. This could be a slippery slope of things to

To those who argued that Detroit kids have low test scores and high dropout rates, Wright said "social deprivation" is a cause. "To hold public schools solely accountable lant fair."
Rep. Ruth Jammick, D-Tpsilanti, said that in her Washtonaw County district, Tive heart that students are not prepared for 15 years. Education doean't meet the needs of childron across the world."
"You're taking away their right to vote," said Laura Bruner Sexton, an East Lansing teacher who grew up in Detroit.
In addition, some Oakland County school boards proposed to be decided as the Detroit school takeover.

Many black leaders in Dotroit – particularly the clergy – favor dumping the elected school hoard for a mayorappointed board.

"For 30 years, education in Detroit has been on a decline," said the Rev. Ned Adams of Detroit. "What's happening to our children in Detroit borders on negligence."
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Peek, a Beptist pastor and business operator. "Ninety-five percent of employees I've hired have been from Detroit public schools. They have not been trained to connect."

been from Detroit public schools. They have not been trained to compete."

"Our schools are failures," said Rev. Horaco Sheffield III of the Ecumenical Ministers Alliance. "No calamitous protest can conceil the truth."

"Our children need to be educated, and I don't care if it comes from Engler or anybody elso, said John Bradford of the UAW-Ford national training center in Detroit. "This is not a voters' rights issue. It's not about race. The community college system has been holding the public schoole up for years (preparing high schoole up for years (preparing high schoole graduates for universities)."

"Fewer than 10 percent of Detroit pupils meet job readiness standards," said John King, a black Detroit resident representing the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce. He said the chamber helped fund four of five millage campaigns for Detroit schools from 1980-94, and business has spent \$15 million to help Detroit schools, but "more than increased funding will be

needed to improve education."

B Detroiters and many outstate Democrat see a sense of unfairness in "picking on" Detroit public schools, blaming educators for social problems and scrapping a school board that was elected in November of 1998.

"Inaving babies at 13 and 12 years of age is not going to lift peeple up," said Robert Johnson, a teacher of 31 years and an assistant pastor in a Detroit Presbyterian church. Thating out a school board is not going to help.

"This bill was wrote up Nov. 6, the day after the election," said Rose Stark, a Detroit mother of six, including two college students. "Now I know why Mayor Archer didn't support (Democratic gubernatorial nominee) Geoffrey Fieger." She said Engler had done a 150-degree turnaround since September when he advecated parental takeover of Detroit school buildings.
"Donnis Archer's not going to

ings.
"Donnis Archer's not going to pick this (replacement) board," predicted Ed Simmers, a Detroit political activist. "John Engler's going to be right behind him saying 'charter schools, charter schools, charter

schools, charter schools."

Helon Moore, representing Black Parents for Quality Education in Detroit, gave the committee 10,000 signatures protesting the bill and said Engler "butterfor motives - charter schools."

Freshman Rep. Triette Linear

schools."
Freshman Rep. Triette Lipsey, Reeves, D-Detroit, told the committee, "Most of you come from local government. If the governor wanted to take over your district."

wanted to take over your district.

Rop. Keith Stallworth, Dotroit, said the bill could polarize the two parties. In contrast to a week enriler when he and other Dotroit lawmakers were African garh and disrupted a Senate committee hearing for two hours, Stallworth was a model of suited decorum before the House panel.

But it led one Republican lawmaker, who saked not to be identified, to predict that "Keith Stallworth will never get a bill passed in this House. He'll never even get a public hearing on any bill of his."

Refer to Senate Bill 297 when

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Refer to Senate Bill 297 when contacting your state representative, State Capitol, Lansing 48090-7514.

Legislators and task force representatives to meet about mental health concerns Monday

Mental health concerns will be the topic of discussion Menday, March 15, when Michigan legislators and the Tri-County Mental that the Tri-County Mental the Mental the Tri-County Mental the Tri-Count

managed care system, impact all of our communities, "Ames said. "The need to provide affordable, quality access to services to adults and children with mental illness or dovelopmental disabili-ties transe-ends any geographic or political boundaries."

The Tri-County Summit, a regional partnership forged between the counties of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb and the city of Detroit first met May 5, 1998, the task force is one of five committees formed to discuss areas of mutual concern to pro-

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vide a unified voice for the

region in seeking solutions.
The legislative breakfas vides an informal, yet highly

effective forum for the community mental health boards from this region to exchange information and ideas with their elected Officials. Beard said.
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