

State tax issues: welfare, potholes, public transit

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Joe Forbes, the Democratic floor leader in the Michigan House of Representatives, aimed a stubby thumb at the electronic tally board. His usual impish grin faded as he said:

"I've got to see 24 on the board before we'll deliver."

The 24 he wanted to see are half plus one of the 46 Republicans in the House. Forbes, a six-term lawmaker and master tactician, insists Gov. Milliken's party put up majority support for a state income tax increase before Democrats put up any of their 64 votes.

"I looked at (William) Bryant (House GOP leader) and asked him, 'How many votes have you got?' He went — 'Forbes made a goose egg with his fingers.'"

"Well, I know he's got a solid six who support the governor . . . Bobby Crim and Bill Ryan and I — we want to do the responsible thing," said Forbes.

an Oak Park veteran whose district includes part of Southfield.

THAT SUMMED UP the situation in the State Capitol last week:

In the House, Republicans want to see more cuts than the \$451 million Milliken proposes to reduce a projected \$566 million deficit. While the caucus position has yet

to jell, Bryant insists welfare must be cut 12 percent to the levels of such neighboring states as Ohio — a move he says would save \$40 million — before Republicans will consider a tax hike.

In the Senate, Republicans and at least one Democrat reacted against Milliken's proposal to use 0.3 of the 0.7 percent state income tax hike for "transportation," broadly defined.

"The transportation money is in trouble," Forbes agreed. "It may be amended out. If the Oakland County Road Commission wants it out, someone will introduce an amendment."

MILLIKEN'S proposals, besides cutting expenses, are aimed at bringing in new revenue by hiking the personal income tax to 5.3 percent from 4.6 percent.

Of the hike, he would use 0.1 percent to ease the treasury's cash flow problem, 0.1 percent for general state government, 0.2 percent for school aid and 0.3 percent for transportation.

"A core of Republicans on the Appropriations Committee want to separate the transportation money from the rest," said Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, whose district includes Livonia, Plymouth and Redford.

"They are not related. The rest is a budget deficit and a cash-flow problem," said Geake.

TRANSPORTATION — freeways, highways, county roads, city streets, public buses and rail transit — are funded by state gasoline and weight taxes. That fund has declined 10 percent in the last couple of years as light-weight commuter autos have come on the roads. But as Geake said, there is no deficit in that special fund.

Milliken made a radical departure from a prac-

analysis

tion of many decades in suggesting transportation be beefed up by general fund revenues such as the income tax.

Oakland road commissioners and Geake objected that this is a violation of the user-benefit concept.

But that didn't bother House GOP Leader Bryant. The Grosse Pointe Farms lawmaker said road interests like having their own special fund so they can deal with one state department for money, and not have to satisfy the legislature.

IN AN APPROPRIATIONS Committee meeting, Sen. James DeSana, D-Wyandotte, raised a third objection to funding transportation with an increased income tax: "Transportation" does not mean highways. It does not deal with chuckholes in the roads."

The complaint is that Milliken has yet to specify how much of his proposed 0.3 percent of the income tax would go for roads and how much for public transit.

In an interview, Sen. Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, was even blunter about some Oakland County objections to public transportation funding: "They don't get along with SEMTA (Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority). The mayor (Detroit Mayor Coleman Young) runs that show — subway, people mover and all that. What Oakland needs is more buses."

Bishop had no objection, however, to a SEMTA commuter rail line which runs from Pontiac to the Detroit Renaissance Center in the morning and back at night. "People use that," he said.

SEMTA is in trouble on operating budgets this year. A January cutback hit the downtown staff, and a March cutback reduced bus and commuter rail service 20 percent. SEMTA officials see cuts totaling two-thirds unless new money is pumped into the system this year.

The Oakland County Road Commission says all the money should go for roads and objects to "sharing with transit on an undetermined basis."

IF THE SENATE scene was focused on the transportation element, the House picture was more diffused.

"We had a closed caucus and let it all out," said Republican Rep. Sylvia Skrel of Livonia. "We just vented our frustrations. All our frustrations."

The mood of Skrel, Bryant and others was to concentrate on the spending portion of the budget.

But one of the frustrations, said Skrel, is that "there are only five Republicans on the Appropriations Committee and 13 Democrats."

Another is the anger of the voters. "My phone rings all hours of the day and night," said Rep. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, a freshman who took over a previously Democratic district. "People think we're spending too much."

Sen. Geake counted 25 phone calls against an income tax increase and three in favor — two from known school employees. "Many are saying they're against it because we just got a big property tax increase," said Geake.

Rep. John Bennett, D-Redford, found a major tax revolt coming because of a 31-percent increase in his township's property assessments.

State reps ask Reagan to meet

The 21-member Michigan congressional delegation has signed a letter asking President Ronald Reagan for a special meeting to discuss the state's worsening economic plight.

The letter, drafted and circulated by Rep. Dennis Hertel, D-Detroit, refers to the president's recent statement to Gov. William G. Milliken acknowledging the state's "depression." In part, it says:

"As you are aware, the national unemployment rate stands at 8.5 percent for January, while Michigan's unemployment rate stands at 16 percent, the highest in the nation. More than 700,000 people are out of work. The state budget has already been cut over 20 percent."

Signed by all 19 representatives in and the two senators, the letter calls for "frank and open discussion of the causes and possible solutions to Michigan's economic problems."

The letter expressed the delegation's willingness to meet with the president "at any time" his schedule permits.

Hertel said the purpose of meeting with the president would be to discuss the state's current economic condition, examine the effects of federal budget cuts in light of the constitution, and explore possible remedies at the federal level.

Session at OCC is for couples

A workshop on pre-marital communications will help all couples, says the Oakland Community College Adult Resource Center.

ARC's workshop begins at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in Room 224 of the Student Center on the Highland Lakes Campus, 7350 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake. Presentation will be by Marlene Gropman.

The workshop will explore expectations after the wedding, feelings about having children, controlling the money, sex and in-laws. Couples will be taught communications skills to express their feelings more confidently.

Price is \$2 per person in advance or \$3 at the door. Registration information is available from OCC at 363-7191, Ext. 858.

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