

Farmington Observer

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Drugstore prescription war mounts

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

If a package of bills becomes state law, some Blue Cross Blue Shield group insurance members will be limited to buying their prescriptions only from designated drugstores if they want reimbursement.

Area pharmacists, though, are dead set against the legislation, fearing it will put smaller druggists out of business.

Proponents say the bill is designed to inject competition into the prescription industry and to lower medical and health insurance costs. But drugstore representatives disagree.

"Our position is basic, very short and simple. We philosophically oppose that type of legislation. We favor free enterprise and a free market," said Perry Drug Store's Berl Falbaum, an assistant vice president of corporate communications.

The legislation was born in the state Department of Management and Budget's Office of Medical and Health Affairs. Its backers say more price competition is needed in the drugstore and prescription industries.

The provisions that would affect pharmacies are actually the smallest, yet most complex portion of the legislative package, said Jean Carlson, deputy commissioner of the Department of Commerce's insurance bureau.

The legislation pertaining to pharmacies is designed to allow health insurers to contract with designated drugstores to provide lower-cost prescriptions to group customers such as General Motors, Carlson said.

A PERSON working for GM would have to buy prescriptions from a drugstore designated by Blue Cross officials if they wanted reimbursement.

Blue Cross would request drugstores from all over the state bid for a contract to sell prescriptions to its group insurance customers.

The lowest bidder would get the contract.

And that's just what worries area pharmacists.

"This eventually will put a lot of stores out of business," said Harry Watson, pharmacist and owner of Godmar Retail Drugs in Farmington.

The fear, according to local pharmacists, is that only the large drugstore chains — offering lower prices and more shopping locations — would get the contract.

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"The ones who don't get signed up get lost in the cold," Watson said. They don't leave the freedom of choice for the patient."

But Watson says he nonetheless has "mixed feelings" about the legislative package.

"Blue Cross has been trying to control costs for a long time," he said, adding he thinks that's a good idea.

Even though he believes the legislation could put smaller drug stores out of business, Watson is taking a wait and see attitude.

BRIAN GORMAN, an Effros Drug Co. assistant pharmacist, is adamantly opposed to the legislation.

"In a sense, what the bill would do is close the small drugstores," Gorman said.

Most disconcerting to Gorman, however, is the impact on customers.

"The chains don't care about customer satisfaction," said Gorman.

To make sure residents and customers know what's happening in Lansing, both Effros Drug Co. and Maple Village Discount Drugs have been collecting signatures on petitions to make their opposition well known to state legislators.

The package of six bills passed the

Petitions, Brooks on road

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Chances are pretty good today that when a crime is committed, the criminal will walk away almost scot-free, said L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County prosecutor.

"We're losing the war. About 7-4. The bad guys are ahead," Patterson told about 65 men and women last Thursday at the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce's monthly meeting at the Botaford Inn.

The Michigan State Police last year reported 603,000 felonies, Patterson said. Of those reported crimes, 89,000 arrests were made. But only 4,023 of those arrested went to prison.

"Chances are if you commit a crime, you'll get away with it," Patterson said.

In 1970, for example, murder was committed every 33 minutes, rape every 14 minutes and robbery every 91 seconds, he said.

THE STATISTICS took a turn for the worse by 1980, however, when murder was committed every 23 minutes, Patterson said. Rape occurred every six minutes and robbery every 68 seconds.

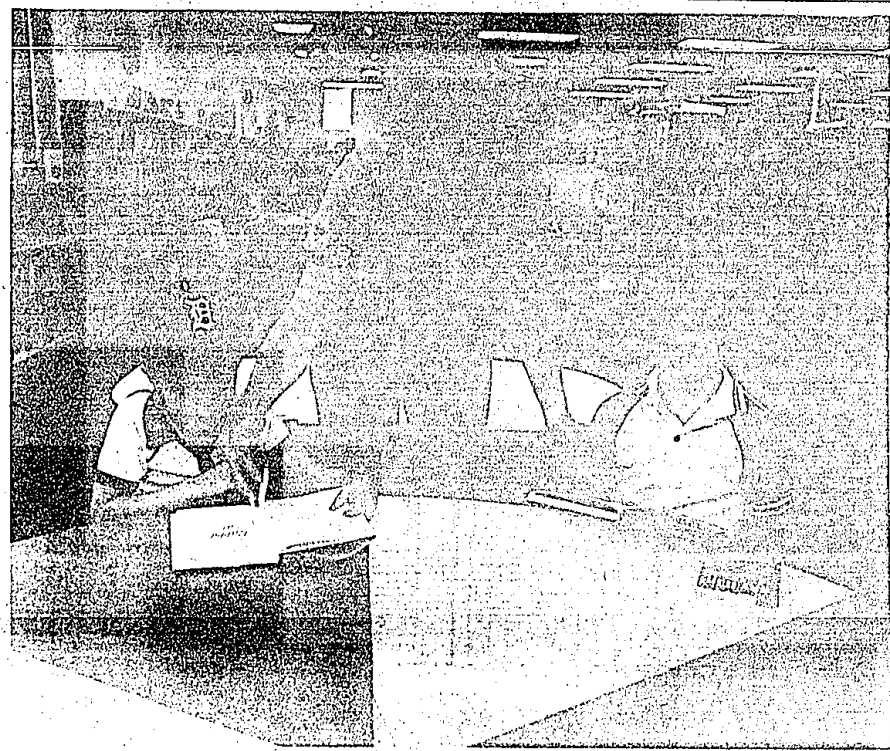
"If you look at those charts, we obviously need reforms. We're losing," said Patterson, first elected as the county's prosecutor in 1972.

Those needed reforms, he said, include changes in the state's parole system, juvenile criminal code, and the prison and correctional department systems.

But with another major election looming on the horizon, Patterson's



Brooks Patterson



RANDY BORDT/staff photographer

Families at the library are becoming a more common sight in the Farmington District system. As the library's role changes, every member finds something of use in the facility. Libraries around

Michigan are preparing for increased use of their buildings. The Zdyrak family — Justin, 8, mother Sue and Jason, 9 — enjoy their time together in the downtown Farmington library.

How other library districts fare in independent system

At a recent Farmington Hills budget hearing, the debate over the use and funding of the community's library was revived. This is the second in a series of stories about the library, its future and how other systems are operated.

By Tom Beer
staff writer

Come November, suburban Avon Township will have a new name and municipal designation — the city of Rochester Hills.

Change is everywhere in this fast-growing community, but one thing that's staying the same is the way its public library is financed. Since its inception in 1934, the Avon Township Library has controlled its finances as a separate taxing authority responsible for its own millage.

A similar plan is being discussed for

the Farmington Community Library, whose budgeting process now is dominated by the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Library officials have said they're not getting all the tax money to which they're entitled because of decisions made by city officials, who may not always understand library problems.

For the library to become autonomous, voters would have to approve both the plan for independence and the millage needed to run the system. A library-independence plan failed in a 1978 election.

THE PLAN is supported by most Farmington library people, including Director Gordon Lewis. City officials and councilmen generally disagree.

But at the Avon Township Library, which has a perpetual millage (no renewal is ever needed) and can levy up to one mill, Director Patricia Wilson

claims it's the only way to finance a library.

"It's been terrific," said Wilson, whose library has quadrupled in size since 1976. "It allows you to plan. The library is able to set its own priorities."

Sometimes voters may be sympathetic with the library and its needs, even while being disgruntled with the municipal government, said Wilson, who controls about 20 full-time employees and has a budget of \$973,000.

"An outside survey was conducted to determine which recreational facilities people took the most advantage of," she said. "We were overwhelmed because we (the library) were so far in front of everything else, including the local municipal park."

Like Avon's library, the West Bloomfield Township Library has been autonomous for many years — even though it took a 1974 court judgment to get the

township to collect the library's millage.

"We have a court judgment stating that we're a separate legal entity for the purpose of collecting taxes," said Director Gretchen Kulberg, whose library is smaller than Farmington's with 11 full-time employees and a circulation of about \$75,000 materials checked out annually.

Asked if she likes being financially independent from the township, Kulberg said, "I'm sitting here in a new building which was built with surplus from our operating budget."

"I have a branch library going up, part of it being funded by federal funds, part by the sale of our old library. Those decisions were made by our library board."

KULBERG CONTINUED, "Library

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Court ruling mandates hopefuls to file again

Candidates for the Michigan House of Representatives have until 4 p.m. Wednesday, June 27, to file nominating petitions or \$100 fees with the Oakland County clerk's office in Pontiac. They will have until 12 noon Friday, June 29, to withdraw.

Those changes were made by the state Supreme Court last week after alarmed county clerks complained they were unable to get ballots printed in time for the Aug. 7 primary if the filing deadlines were moved to July 11, as the court originally ordered.

Wayne County Clerk James Kilbom also is seeking a court order to eliminate the requirement that candidates' names be rotated on the ballot, arguing it would save two weeks in printing when districts were little changed by last week's ruling.

The rotation rule requires that candidates' names not be run in alphabetical order, so that persons at the beginning of the alphabet would not have a ballot advantage.

THE CHANGES will allow election officials to conduct the Aug. 7 primary

on schedule rather than delay it a month, as some officials had feared.

All House candidates will have to file anew, said Oakland County elections Director Howard Altman — even those whose districts were little changed by last week's ruling.

Candidates may get on the ballot either by filing nominating petitions signed by registered voters or by paying a \$100 fee. About 94 percent pay the fee, Altman said.

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