

State of the State

Blanchard emphasizes youth and winning

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Vague. More detail. That's how area state senators greeted early versions of Gov. James J. Blanchard's first State of the State message of his second term.

"Competitiveness" and "families" — two favorite Republican terms — stood out in the Democratic governor's outline message.

"WIN" WAS another favorite word of Blanchard, who won 61 percent of the vote last Nov. 6. Categories in his message were labeled "Winning the Jobs of Tomorrow" (economics), "Preparing Our People to Win" (job training), "Winning the Fight for Safety" (crime) and "Winning by Caring" (welfare proposals) and so on.

Blanchard's top interest appeared to be youth. Major initiatives covered job training, tougher sentencing, a pre-school program, camps for problem juveniles, more school aid and a 20th state department to deal with child and family problems.

And he saw Michigan's top challenge as "rapid global economic change."

The speech to a joint session of the Legislature Wednesday evening was more a list of promised benefits than a blueprint of how to achieve them. Lawmakers applauded, but their desire for more detail cut across party lines.

"I'M MORE impressed by deeds," said second-term Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, ignoring Blanchard's Republican rhetoric.

"It's frustrating. He's unwilling to make commitments until he knows which way the wind is blowing at Sallie House (JAW headquarters in Detroit)."

Cruce pointed to Blanchard's pledge to "take further steps to reduce workers compensation and unemployment insurance costs," responding:

"He doesn't say (how). He plans to do nothing." Cruce said he would be impressed if Blanchard were to support 1) a more stringent definition of disability and 2) a waiting week for job less benefits.

Cruce will continue to oppose another key Blanchard strategy — the Michigan Strategic Fund.

"The philosophy in the Commerce Department is to pick a few favorites (companies) and reward them from the treasury. Politics."

"If we were to lessen the cost for Main Street businesses, it would provide more jobs (than the Youth Job Corps) and wouldn't cost the state anything."

"DETAIL ON 'quality education'" will be awaited by Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, an educator in private life. "All the first statements are general," Faxon said, scanning an outline of the text.

Key Blanchard educational proposals and Faxon's responses:

- A cabinet council on human investment — "I don't understand that."

- A preschool program for 4-year-olds "at risk" — "I favor preschool programs. There's lots of evidence it's helpful. But the only way it works is if there's a followup. That's why the federal programs, which didn't have followup, failed."

- Tests to measure whether students have employable skills — "I don't think we need more tests. If they're talking about employable skills, the most important factor is attitude. A test isn't necessary to determine attitude. If they're eager to learn you can train them. Do they want to learn? Do they accept the fact that someone knows more (about the job) than they do?"
- Encourage local business.

Panel asks tax shift off property

AP — A state Senate citizens panel plans to ask for sweeping changes in the state property tax system, including a statewide assessment to help finance public schools.

The Senate Citizens Property Tax Commission approved the recommendations last week. The suggestions will be worked into a final report by Senate staff members this week, and that report is expected to be released next week.

"The present (property tax) system isn't working," said Kent Reynolds, a member of the commission's school financing subcommittee.

"There is tax payment inequity and there is student inequity."

THE PANEL suggested no specific amount for a statewide property tax, but said 17 or 18 mills was reasonable.

The average local operating tax is 32 mills. It said communities, which could add to the basic statewide assessment, should aim at spending about \$3,000 per student per year.



Gov. James J. Blanchard "preparing to win"

school compacts — "Nothing wrong. But making them employable doesn't mean they're going to find jobs."

- Formula funding for the 15 universities — "Political realities" and inter-collegiate competition always have obstructed progress, though Faxon likes the idea.

Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, wasn't in the Capitol Wednesday afternoon.

"THE WHOLE message has the flavor of what Republicans have



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been saying for years," said R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, beginning his 12th year in the state Senate.

"It sounds scarcely distinguishable from a moderate Republican philosophy," Geake said, stressing "sounds." "When we look at details, though, we may not see changes like eliminating the waiting week for unemployment compensation."

Geake, who chairs the Senate Appropriation subcommittee on social services, likes:

- Blanchard's emphasis on such favorite Republican words as "family" and "competitiveness."
- The governor's willingness to "deal with product liability" and reducing costs of workers comp and unemployment comp.
- Blanchard's effort to reduce the general assistance welfare rolls,

for able-bodied men, gradually. "I would cut them off for the six summer months. Now the governor is nudging them off gradually through tightened eligibility standards."

GEAKE DISLIKES:
• Blanchard's rosy optimism on reducing ADC welfare rolls. Blanchard is projecting an ADC caseload of 203,000 while the Senate Fiscal Agency is projecting 212,000. The governor is anticipating a drop of 12,000 general assistance caseloads from 105,000. "I don't think that's realistic." Thus, Geake sees little chance the state can increase welfare benefits by 3 percent due to a declining caseload as Blanchard proposes.

- Creation of a 20th state department to be responsible for policies dealing with children and families. The

departments of Mental Health, Social Services, Public Health, Education and Corrections already have such responsibilities, and Geake said a new department would be "disruptive" because "in our society there's no clear line between childhood and adulthood, no clear lines of responsibility."

SEN. WILLIAM Faust, D-Westland, was on vacation until Monday

and couldn't comment. Sen. George Hart, D-Dearborn, whose district includes Garden City, was in a Capitol corridor but was not ready to comment.

Speaking for the Black Caucus, state Rep. Alma G. Stallworth, D-Detroit, saw "isolated improvements for the black community" but "accelerated" levels of poverty and joblessness.

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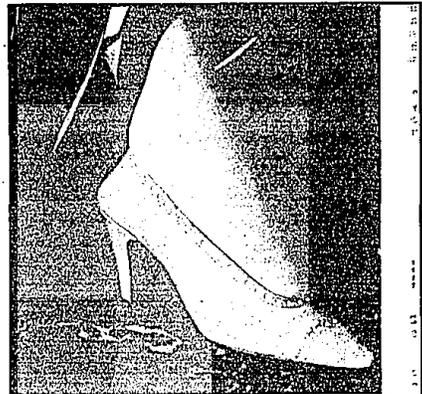
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