Area Dems back U.S. welfare overhaul

Roll Call Report

Here's how area members of Congress were recorded on major roll call votes on Dec. 11 and in the week ending Dec. 18.

HOUSE

WELFARE REFORM — By a vote of 230 for and 194 against, the House passed and sent to the Senate a major overhaul of the federal-state mechanism that provides welfare to the poor. The bill (HR 1720) carries a pricetag of $5 billion over five years.

The legislation stops short of making work mandatory for welfare recipients, as Republicans had advocated.

It requires recipients to enter education, training and work programs that each state would have to set up under the legislation. Presently 3.8 million families with 7 million children participate in the basic federal-state welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

To shift the chronically poor from the dole to payrolls, the legislation provides such inducements as expanded day care services, fair wage standards for entry-level jobs and paycheck withholding to ensure that absent parents pay child support.

It also enables two-parent families to receive welfare if the main wage earner is unemployed and sets a priority of keeping poor teenagers from becoming permanently dependent on welfare.

Supporter Bill Richardson, D-N.M., said major reform is needed of the current system, which among other deficiencies breaks up families and encourages lifelong dependence on the dole.

Opponent Dan Lungren, R-Calif., complained that the bill "does not require a single welfare recipient to work (or) a single welfare recipient to look for a job."

Members voting yes supported the bill. Voting yes were Democrats Dennis Hertel of Harper Woods, William Ford of Taylor and Sander Levin of Southfield.

Voting no: Republicans Carl Pursell of Plymouth and William Broomfield of Birmingham.

CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS — The House adopted, 336 for and 87 against, an amendment to lower the projected cost of the welfare reform bill (above) by 10 percent, to about $5 billion over five years.

Under the amendment, states would have to require the withholding of child support obligations from paychecks. By increasing the flow of child support money to welfare families, the Republican-authored provision would cut federal welfare costs by an estimated $139 million over five years.

"Three out of every four welfare cases begin because of divorce or a child being born out of wedlock or separation," said supporter Michael Andrews, D-Tex. "We have to stop the hemorrhage of child support payments not being made available to spouses trying to care for young children."

Opponent Cardis Collins, D-Ill., said in a written statement to the Congressional Record that payroll withholding of child support should be made mandatory only after a parent misses a payment.

Members voting yes supported the amendment. Voting yes: Pursell, Hertel, Levin, Broomfield.

Voting no: Ford.

PUBLIC BUILDINGS — By a vote of 271 for and 86 against, the House passed and sent to the Senate a bill (HR 2790) changing General Services Administration procedures for acquiring and managing federal office space.

The bill attempts to curb the GSA's pro-leasing policy. Although construction is cheaper in the long run, it appears in annual fiscal projections to be more expensive because the full cost of new buildings must be budgeted in one year by the GSA.

To overcome political and fiscal impediments to annual construction appropriations, the bill authorizes the GSA to borrow construction funds from the Treasury.

Supporter Martin Lancaster, D-N.C., said the GSA would remain fiscally accountable to Congress under the borrowing procedure, because its debt repayments each year would be tallied as part of the Congressional budget resolution.

Opponent Robert Walker, R-Pa., said the bill would deprive Congress of control over the GSA construction budget and thus encourage the agency to build more federal buildings than are needed.

Members voting yes supported the legislation.

Voting yes: Hertel, Levin, Broomfield.

Voting no: Pursell.

Not voting: Ford.

SENATE

BUDGET REFORM — By a vote of 44 for and 51 against, the Senate rejected an amendment to break Congress of its habit of lumping all 13 appropriations bills into a single "continuing resolution" that the president must accept or veto en masse.

Not coincidentally, the vote occurred as the Senate debated a continuing resolution (HJ Res 395) to fund most federal operations in fiscal 1988. The $606 billion spending measure, the most expensive bill ever considered by Congress, later was sent to conference with the House on a non-record, voice vote.

Under the rejected amendment, any longterm continuing resolutions passed by Congress in fiscal 1989 and 1990 would be disassembled into individual appropriations bills before being sent to the White House. The president thus could evaluate each of the 13 appropriations bills on its own merits.

Senators voting yes supported the amendment.

Voting no were Michigan Democrats Carl Levin and Donald Riegle.

LEGAL SERVICES — By a vote of 70 for and 28 against, the Senate tabled (killed) an amendment to the 1988 continuing resolution (above) requiring that all appropriations for the Legal Services Corp. be spent directly on legal aid to the poor.

Foes of the amendment saw it as an attempt to cripple the quasi-governmental agency.

Amendment sponsor Phil Gramm, R-Texas, said taxpayers should not be funding LSC activities such as lobbying "that have little or nothing to do with providing legal services for the poor . . ."

Senators voting yes were opposed to the amendment. Levin and Riegle voted yes.

OCC to hold registration

Oakland Community College's regular registration for the winter semester will be Monday and Tuesday, Jan. 4-5, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Classes begin on Wednesday, Jan. 6.

Applications for the winter semester are now being accepted. New students should contact the admissions counselor at the campus of their choice for a schedule of classes and information on admission procedures.

Students may register at any of the following OCC campus locations: the Auburn Hills Campus in Auburn Hills (853-4200); the Highland Lakes Campus in Union Lake (360-3000); the Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills (471-7500); and the Royal Oak Campus in Royal Oak (967-5700). Southfield Campus students will register at the Royal Oak site.