

County readies for citizens grand jury

By Matt Jachman
staff writer

A citizens grand jury — the first in Oakland County in 17 years — will begin looking into a dozen unsolved murders and a number of drug trafficking cases next month.

County Prosecutor Richard Thompson said the grand jury will

be impaneled just after Labor Day. It will investigate unsolved murders that police agencies in the county believe could be solved through a grand jury probe.

The jury will also explore drug cases that Thompson said could lead police to higher-ups in narcotics distribution.

"It's something we are trying out for the first time in a long time," he said. "This will be a testing period." Thompson would not discuss specific murder cases to be presented to the jury, but said some are several years old.

THE JURY, for which the county Board of Commissioners approved

\$50,000 funding last month, was created by the 14 judges of the Oakland County Circuit Court. Thompson in May petitioned the court to authorize the jury, and later met with the judges to discuss the need for a grand jury.

The 17-member jury will be impaneled for six months. Thompson

said he may ask the court for a six-month extension, depending on how the cases progress. State law allows for a six-month grand jury and one six-month extension.

Judge Robert Anderson will oversee the jury and be available to answer legal questions, but will not sit in on the sessions, Thompson said. Potential jurors will be picked from the county's list of registered voters and sent a questionnaire, then interviewed by Anderson, who will select the jury.

continue to refuse to testify.

Witnesses are allowed to have legal counsel, the prosecutor said. Those who are targets of the probe are told so before they appear.

It takes a vote of nine jurors — a simple majority — to hand down an indictment. If a person is indicted, the everyday criminal legal process — the issuance of a warrant, an arrest and arraignment, a preliminary hearing and, possibly, a trial — kicks in.

Roll Call Report

Here's how Observer & Eccentric area members of Congress were recorded on major roll call votes in the week ending Aug. 4.

HOUSE:

THE BUDGET FOR CONGRESS — By a vote of 291 for and 123 against, the House approved a fiscal 1990 budget of \$1.6 billion for itself and congressional support agencies. That is an increase of 14 percent over the comparable fiscal 1989 bill. After the Senate adds its budget of more than \$400 million, the cost of operating the legislative branch in 1990 will top \$2 billion. Members' salaries of nearly \$50 million are funded separately.

Among items in the House-passed bill are \$189 million for the salaries of House members' personal staffs (up 5 percent from the comparable 1989 figure), \$118 million for committee operations including staff salaries (up 7 percent) and \$123 million for House members' and senators' free-mail privileges. The postage sum is open-ended and likely to be increased, despite new language reducing from six to four the number of mass mailings House members can send to constituents each year.

Supporter Vic Fazio, D-Calif., said "this is a very tight, austere budget." Opponent Hank Brown, R-Colo., said Congress has "a staff that is 10 times as big as any other government in the world for its deliberative body."

Members voting yes supported the bill.

Michigan members voting yes were Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth; Dennis Hertel, D-Harper Woods; William Ford, D-Taylor and Sander Levin, D-Southfield.

William Broomfield, R-Lake Orion, voted no.

TO CUT CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET — By a vote of 167 for and 246 against, the House rejected an amendment cutting nearly all areas of the 1990 legislative branch budget (above) by 6.25 percent, for a savings of \$97 million.

What used to be called the "11 Billion Congress" has become the "12 Billion Congress," said amendment sponsor Bill Frenzel, R-Minn.

Opponent Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., said the amendment "would cut some items that are very fundamental in terms of the members' ability to work around this place."

Members voting yes supported a 6.25 percent cut in the fiscal 1990 legislative branch budget.

Michigan members voting yes were Pursell and Broomfield. Hertel, Ford and Levin voted no.

TO RAISE THE DEBT LIMIT — The House voted 231 for and 185 against to raise the national debt ceiling by \$70 billion to about \$2.87 trillion. The new limit (HR 3024), which was sent to the Senate, will enable the government to pay its bills while awaiting congressional approval of a separate measure putting the federal borrowing limit at \$3.125 trillion.

Supporter Bill Archer, R-Texas, said: "As distasteful as any increase in the federal debt may be to me personally and to many others in this chamber, we should adopt this measure."

Opponent Paul Henry, R-Mich., said: "By allowing this short-term hike of the debt limit... we are absolving ourselves of our responsibility to face some very fundamental questions about America's economic health."

Members voting yes supported the higher debt ceiling.

Michigan members Ford and Levin voted yes. Pursell, Hertel and Broomfield voted no.

SENATE:

MX MISSILE — By a vote of 82 for and 38 against, the House tabled (killed) an amendment stripping the fiscal 1990 defense authorization bill of nearly half of its funding for establishing a rail-based MX missile system. The amendment sought to remove \$592 million in procurement money while retaining \$600 million in the bill for continued research into transferring the multi-warhead MX from stationary silos to moving railroad cars.

The vote occurred as the Senate sent a \$305 billion military spending bill (S 1352) to the House. It preserved an

administration pact with many Democratic leaders in Congress to fund a mobile missile system consisting of both the rail-garrisoned MX and the truck-borne, single-warhead Midgetman. The House version of the bill decimates that agreement.

Senators voting yes supported full funding for putting MX missiles on railroad cars.

Michigan Democratic Senators Carl Levin and Donald Riegle voted no.

CUBA AND DRUGS — By a vote of 73 for and 27 against, the Senate tabled (killed) an amendment to the 1990 defense bill (above) seeking to curb what intelligence sources say is Cuban Premier Fidel Castro's contribution to America's drug problem. The measure sought to get at Cuba

through its provider the Soviet Union.

The amendment called for denying American aid to any Soviet state until President George Bush certifies Cuba is not a transit point for illegal drug shipments to the United States. American aid reaches the Soviet Union through world development banks and other channels.

John Warner, R-Va., who voted to kill the amendment, said it could upset U.S. Soviet relations in such areas as arms control.

Amendment sponsor William Armstrong, R-Colo., accused Cuba of "sending in the poisonous substances, which are killing and ruining the lives of our young people."

Michigan Levin and Riegle voted yes.

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