

Pursell Seeks To Save School Aid

While school districts have their backs to the wall, State Sen. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth) hopes to help find a solution to Michigan's budget deficit without lopping funds out of already tight school budgets.

"I don't want to see any cutbacks until all alternatives are thoroughly analyzed within a reasonable amount of time," he said.

"My candid opinion is that we ought to resolve the short-range problems as quickly as possible so that the (school) boards will know what they have available."

Pursell, a freshman senator from the 14th District, which includes Plymouth, Livonia and Farmington, is the only senator from southeastern Michigan who is on the eight-member Senate Appropriations Committee.

FACED with a \$108 million deficit, Gov. Milliken has said that \$27 million could be made up in cutbacks in the state's financial aid to school districts. The \$12 million would come from severely cutting the \$19.5 million "grandfather clause" which assures school districts their appropriations will not be less than the previous year.

The remaining \$15 million would come from a flat two per cent cutback in state aid to each district.

While Pursell is opposed to cutting any school funds unless absolutely necessary, he said he objected to the flat two per cent measure because it would hurt some districts more than others.

state funds than do districts with strong tax bases, he said.

Pursell said he has met with representatives from several school districts to get their opinions and any alternatives they might suggest.

School districts already suffered one major setback this fall when they had to make room in their budgets to provide free textbooks for students after the Supreme Court ruled that free education included the educational tools.

But the question becomes where to make up the deficit when 51 per cent of the state budget is "untouchable" and

the remaining 49 per cent involves "people," Pursell said.

THE "touchable" part of the budget includes such areas as mental health (which already suffered a cutback in a deficit problem last fall) and social services including welfare, and education.

alternatives which he feels will temporarily make up the deficit, though he cautions that long-range planning must be considered also.

Among his suggestions would be to switch to a consignment basis of buying and selling state liquor which

would make an estimated \$20 million available. Other funds could be scraped up utilizing available federal funds recently negotiated by the Social Services Dept., reducing payments for physician services and pharmaceutical costs under the state's medical program, and continuing a freeze on non-essential state positions.

An unpopular Pursell proposal is to cut expenditures in the legislative, judicial, and executive branches by five per cent. He estimates this will account for about \$90,000.

"I realize these out-of-state committee 'junks,' as they are popularly called, provide

useful information in preparing legislation and in effecting more efficient operation procedures in state government," Pursell said.

But I do feel strongly that our financial crisis is of such magnitude that this sort of travel could be dispensed with for the duration of the crisis, except, of course, in the case of some absolutely vital mission.

"In times of dire financial need, the Legislature should be eager to provide the leadership to show other agencies of state government the way to cutting expenses."

PURSELL urged fast ac-

tion on the "fiscal crisis" because "the longer we wait the less time we have to effect the reductions."

Some legislators have suggested "categorically" cutting school funds such as those for special education, driver training and transportation.

"The state would be dictating to the local district," Pursell said, in opposition to this plan.

He added that if the House and Senate committees decided to borrow funds from other programs, they would require the approval of the Legislature, thus taking more time and leaving school dis-

tricts in limbo as to how to adjust their budgets.

Immediate tax increases would not resolve the problems either, because even if the taxes went in effect tomorrow, they would not be available to solve the immediate crisis, Pursell said.

Michigan law requires that the state operate on a balanced budget throughout the year, and that the appropriations committees resolve any deficits occurring during the year.

In terms of long-range planning in education, Pursell thinks the year-round school plans offer an efficient use of resources and funding.

1970 Highway Funds Drop

Observerland municipalities are receiving nearly 27 less in highway funds this year than they did at the same time in 1969.

This year Wayne County will net \$5,165,617 for the last three months of 1970 from the Motor Vehicle Highway Fund as compared with \$5,337,435 in the last quarter of 1969.

Oakland County is experiencing a similar cut from \$2,031,331 in 1969 to \$2,008,942 in 1970.

State Highway Department analysts blame the general economic slow-down along with the work stoppage in the auto industry for the decline in gasoline taxes.

In Oakland County, Beverly Hills will get \$28,153 compared to \$28,927 in 1969; Bingham Farms, \$1,819 com-

pared to \$1,872 in 1969; Birmingham, \$69,505 in 1970 and \$71,196 in 1969; Farmington, \$19,588 in 1970 and \$20,049 in 1969; Franklin, \$8,867 in 1970 and \$9,112 in 1969; Lathrup Village, \$13,070 in 1970 and \$13,141 in 1969; Quakertown, \$3,081 in 1970 and \$2,103; Southfield, \$147,795 in 1970 and \$152,060 in 1969; and Wood Creek Farms, \$3,006 in 1970 and \$3,095 in 1969.

In Wayne County, Garden City nets \$99,130 in 1970 as opposed to \$101,925 for the last quarter of 1969; Livonia, \$213,755 in 1970 and \$218,282 in 1969; Plymouth, \$23,478 in 1970 from \$24,220 in 1969; and Westland, \$186,087 in 1970 from \$183,387.

The highway fund consists of state taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel and license plate fees paid by motorists.

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