

# 'Polluter pay' bill is rejected

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Local senators voted with their parties as the Michigan Senate rejected a "polluter pay" bill, as rewritten by Republican moderates.

"I'm not sure what to do next," said a stunned Sen. Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, after Tuesday's debate ended in 22-16 defeat.

"The goal was to embarrass me," said Senate majority leader John Engler, the probable Republican gubernatorial nominee. Engler had praised Ehlers for having "the patience of Job, working with a sponsor (Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor) who used it for partisan political advantage."

Goal of both versions was to allow the DNR to get faster clean-ups of 2,600 known toxic waste sites by charging identifiable polluters rather than using state money.

THE VOTE Tuesday was 16 in favor and 22 against Senate Bill 375. Voting yes were 14 Republicans and two conservative Democrats. Doug Cruce of Troy, Richard Fessler of Commerce, Robert Geake of Northville and Rudy Nichols of Waterford voted yes.

Opposed were 16 Democrats and six Republicans, including four GOP conservatives who thought the bill would "push industry out of the state" and one who favored the tougher Pollack version. Among the no votes were William Faust of Westland, Jack Faxon of Farmington Hills and George Hart of Dearborn.

None of the local senators spoke. Pollack denounced the defeated version as "an abomination" and "a polluters payoff bill," asking that her name be removed as sponsor after the bill was amended.

Senate minority leader Art Miller, D-Warren, said "it's not worth the paper it's written (sic) on."

"EMPTY RHETORIC," replied Ehlers, chairman of the Senate Natural Resources Committee and sponsor of most of the amendments to the original Pollack bill.

Ehlers said the final version gave Pollack, environmental lobbyists and DNR director David Hates "90 to 95 percent" of what they wanted.

Only a few points of difference actually were argued in the day-long debate. Among them:

• The DNR's role. Ehlers' version set up an Environmental Mediation Panel of three scientists with master's degrees, plus five non-voting public members, to resolve disputes.

"The question is whether someone with a bachelor's degree in sociology from the DNR should tell someone with a master's degree in science what to do. I wanted technical ex-

pertise," said Ehlers, adding that his panel would work faster than the court appeals certain to arise under Pollack's version.

POLLACK'S REPLY: "The mediation scheme totally cuts out the public. Environmental groups don't want it."

She added: "At least DNR is a public agency. At least the public can bring pressure on the agency. You can't bring pressure on them (three scientists). You can't fire them."

• Lenders' roles. Ehlers' amendment excluded banks, savings and loans and other lenders who don't participate in polluting but acquire properties through foreclosure.

# GOP lawmakers differ on Detroit tax

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Republicans argued with Republicans as the Michigan Senate last week voted to authorize the city of Detroit to continue levying a 5-per-cent tax on utilities.

"I don't have to send how Detroit would raise \$60 million a year to keep hundreds of police officers on the street but the economic health of the shrinking central city."

"I don't have to send how Detroit to the people of Detroit to move into my district," said Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy. "They're doing so because their elected representation is bound and determined to tax them right out of existence," he said, noting Oakland County's population has grown 10 percent in the last decade.

"I DON'T think Detroit is here with their hand out today," replied Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Commerce. "The last thing we need in Michigan is a city of Detroit that looks like it's financially unstable, a city of Detroit that may have to layoff in the public safety area."

Fessler said Detroiters are "flooding" to suburbs not because of taxes but for open space, recreation, lakes and streams.

The final vote was 26-12. Area senators favoring the tax were Fessler and Democrat William Faust of Westland and Jack Faxon of Farmington Hills.

Opposed were Republicans Cruce, Robert Geake of Northville and Rudy Nichols of Waterford along with Democrat George Hart of Dearborn.

CRUCE LOST two amendments

aimed at keeping the tax off suburban and statewide consumers.

One would have exempted welfare recipients from the tax on natural gas, electricity and intrastate telephone service. "It's our constituents who are paying the taxes that are going over to the Department of Social Services," said Cruce. The amendment lost 18-15.

Cruce's other amendment, rejected 24-12, would have exempted industrial users of electricity and steam. "About 60 percent of the tax is paid by industrial and commercial users," said Cruce, "and over 90 percent of those products have to be purchased by people outside the city. Who pays the price? It's the people who live in your (suburban) district."

VOTING FOR the bill and against Cruce's amendments was

Senate majority leader John Engler, the GOP gubernatorial hopeful. He and Republican leaders cut a deal whereby the Senate would approve the House-passed Detroit-utility tax in return for House passage of the Senate's drastic cut in the inheritance tax.

Both bills are on Gov. James Blanchard's desk for signature. Blanchard hinted he may veto the inheritance tax cut.

The Detroit tax was declared illegal by Wayne Circuit Judge Marvin Stiemper, who ruled it expired in mid-1988.

The tax still faces constitutional challenges from businesses. They say the new bill is a new tax, which must be approved by Detroit voters, as required by the 1978 Headlee amendment to the state constitution.



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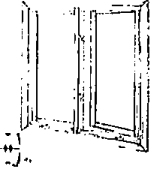
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