

DIA's large subsidy stirs hot debate



Jan Dolan backs millage idea

By Ralph R. Echlinaw
staff writer

As part of his proposed budget to the Legislature, Gov. John Engler has asked for an abrupt end to the Detroit Institute of Arts' \$18 million annual subsidy beginning next fiscal year in October.

Already, the Republican governor has succeeded in reducing the subsidy to \$14.5 million for the current fiscal year, but say they are alarmed by the specter of losing the subsidy altogether.

Museum officials and elected politicians who believe in the ascendancy of the arts and the government's role as a helium balloon were upset by the \$1.5-million cut, but they are alarmed by the specter of losing the subsidy altogether.

Museum director Samuel Sachs II said the DIA will effectively go out

of business if Engler's wish comes true.

Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, noted that many museums in this country receive smaller state subsidies than the DIA.

Solicited art museums in Chicago, Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Toledo that each receive less than 5 percent of their budget in state subsidies, whereas the DIA gets more than 50 percent of its budget from the state, even after the \$1.5-million cut.

"There's no museum in the country that relies on state aid for operation like the DIA does," Dolan said. "Any time you rely that heavily on tax dollars and something happens, you're in trouble. And that's what's happening now."

DOLAN CHARGED that DIA personnel don't work hard enough to raise private funding. "The perception here in Lansing is that 'You

don't even try.' Although (DIA officials) are improving, they have not made it obvious that (visitors) will make a donation."

Dolan is making noises now about a plan whereby Macomb, Wayne and Oakland counties would put a small millage request on a ballot perhaps as early as 1992 to subsidize the DIA and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in lieu of state subsidization. (The plan was first suggested in a 1978 column by Observer & Eccentric Lansing correspondent Tim Richard.)

Dolan said she bases her plan on the "very good educated guess" that "99 out of 100" DIA and DSO patrons reside in Macomb, Wayne or Oakland counties.

Most local legislators agree the DIA should be weaned to some extent from state subsidization.

SEN. JACK Faxon, D-Farmington

Hills, is an exception. Were it up to him, Faxon said, no arts subsidy would be cut in order to balance the budget.

"Obviously, (the cuts that Engler suggests) are devastating and incredibly insensitive," he said. "It would be inconceivable that the governor would even consider that this institution should be 'amputated.'"

Faxon compared shutting the DIA to "closing down the University of Michigan in terms of what that means to the state."

Rep. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, said he supports arts subsidies, but is willing to compromise in light of the state's budget situation.

The DIA, he said, should continue to reduce reliance on its state subsidy, but the subsidy should be reduced slowly, giving DIA officials time to raise more money from private sources.

Rep. Jim Kosteva, D-Canton, agreed. "The DIA is a clear example of where we just can't use the governor's meat-axe methodology," he said, explaining that arts subsidies should be reduced slowly.

Rep. Mat Dunaskis, R-Lake Orion, goes along with Kosteva. "(The DIA subsidy) should be 'ratcheted-down,'" he said—but not eliminated.

Dunaskis added that public contributions to state arts programs, including the DIA, would be higher if the organizations didn't have as much state money coming in.

Like Faxon, Sen. George Hart, D-DeARBorn, opposes arts subsidy cuts. "The arts are an easy target," he said in a prepared statement. "No pun intended, but those who are supporting cuts in funding paint a picture of a bunch of longhairs wearing berets benefiting from state funding."

Fate of state arts support remains in limbo

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"We might not be able to serve the state as well as we could," Slade said. "(But) we've got to be realistic about this and see (the cuts) in view of the overall economy."

Engler also proposes to break the Detroit Institute of Arts' reliance on tax subsidies, removing the museum's \$16 million annual grant all at once.

Museum officials have said the 105-year-old institution will die without its financial fix, even though there were no state subsidies to the DIA until 1966.

SEN. R. ROBERT Geake, R-Northville, summarized the arts controversy best when he said, "One person's pork is another person's cultural necessity."

"Eliminating the arts from the state budget will mean the end of hundreds of elementary, middle and high school art programs and the scaling back or closing of many art and cultural organizations," said

Marilyn Wheaton, Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan executive director.

Overall state funding for the arts was about \$40 million last year, an average of \$6 per taxpayer and about one-half of 1 percent of the total state general fund budget, she said.

Geake, who represents Redford, Livonia, Plymouth and Canton, said arts subsidies should be pared, but not slashed. "Clearly, we cannot afford to do all the things we've been doing (with arts funding)," he said.

Rep. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, likes to talk about arts cuts in the broader context of reducing government's size. "We've gotten to be too many things to too many people," he said. "We've got a structural problem where we always seem to spend more than we take in."

Bouchard supports reducing arts subsidies, but eschews Engler's drastic proposal for eliminating them. "All the grants to everything will have to be reduced by necessity, but

we need to do it at a speed that (recipients) can react to," he said.

Rep. Lyn Banks, R-Livonia, a DIA Founders Society member, supports Engler's plan to slash arts subsidies. "We are faced with such huge deficit that I support what the governor is trying to do," she said. "You don't have to be a mathematical genius to know we have to take drastic measures."

How can one suggest maintaining arts funding, she asks, when "we've got children who are hungry and uneducated with no place to sleep?"

BANKES SUPPORTS a plan pushed by Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, to ask Macomb, Wayne and Oakland counties to ask voters for an "arts millage" to replace state subsidies to the DIA, Detroit Symphony Orchestra and smaller county programs.

Dolan guesses that "99 out of 100" DIA visitors are from the tri-county area. "Those who benefit from it should pay for it," Banks said.

Overall, Banks sees a tide of reality sweeping over Lansing. "I think

you're going to see honesty in budgeting here that has not gone on before," she said. "You couldn't run a business like we run the state."

The best-known arts advocate is Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, who would not cut arts subsidies if balancing the budget were left to him.

Faxon argues that every dollar the state spends on arts subsidies generates \$4 or \$5 in the Michigan economy. Further, he said the arts are "common to all the people of the state" and therefore must be pretty important.

Faxon said people who don't believe the arts should be subsidized by the state haven't learned to appreciate the arts properly. "The governor seems to lack a sensitivity to the validity of the arts," he said. "I don't think he realizes what it represents. He has never integrated the arts into his life."

Faxon compared Engler's attitude to that of a man who never gets sick, so doesn't believe in the necessity of hospitals.

WHILE REP. Jim Kosteva, D-Canton, believes "arts funding needs to reduce its dependence on the state," he compared Engler's approach to "wielding a meat-axe."

Kosteva prefers Democratic House speaker Lewis Dodak's budget plan to Engler's, but admits "the budget numbers don't lie. Everybody's going to have to feel a little pain on this. We (Democrats) are just trying to be more rational."

Dodak's plan calls for using more than three-fourths of the state government's "rainy day" fund (at least \$34 million) to cancel a third of the estimated \$1.1 billion deficit, leaving about \$100 million in the fund.

Dodak proposes to save another third of the deficit with employee furloughs, early retirement incentives, sale of assets and more. Dodak would wipe out the rest of the deficit with budget cuts. However, his plan does not say how deeply arts subsidies would be cut.

SEN. GEORGE Hart, D-DeARBorn, whose district includes Garden City,

also opposes Engler's plan, arguing that arts cut advocates are anti-education. "There are people in Lansing who would like to turn the clock back to the Middle Ages when only princes and princesses would have the benefits of a well-rounded education," he said in a prepared statement.

Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield, said in tough economic times, state government should place social services above arts funding. "There are more desperate and needy people that we have to take care of first," she said.

"These people are never going to make it to a symphony or get down to the DIA."

Whatever happens in regard to state arts subsidies, one thing is certain: Because the state constitution requires a balanced budget, government must reform its financial behavior and spend less, at least for a year or two.

"The gravy train has been derailed, and it's being dismantled," Dolan said.

Roundhouse fulfills dream

Continued from Page 1

with a cupola, which conceals the roof vents.

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Submissions will be subject to editing. Please keep your memories to 300 words or less.

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Mail your memories to: Meadow Brook Memories, c/o Special Sections Editor, Editorial Department, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

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