

# Tax base sharing moves along in House

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Fighting a losing battle, suburban state representatives this week were asking voter approval of any plan forcing school districts to share their business property taxes.

"This should go to the voters. It's a more drastic change than even a graduated income tax," said Rep. Willis Bullard, R-Highland.

"This is radical. It's a major, major change," agreed Rep. Tom Power, R-Traverse City.

But Bullard and Rep. Barbara

Dobb, R-West Bloomfield, wound up on the short end as the House Taxation Committee rejected the amendment to put tax base sharing on the ballot. Rep. James Kostera, D-Canton, voted with the Democratic majority.

THE PANEL then voted Tuesday to report out the second of a pair of bills that would force mainly suburban districts to give half the growth of their commercial and industrial tax bases to poorer districts.

Later that morning, the full House postponed consideration of the controversial bills, one of which is sponsored by Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City.

Dobb, a freshman lawmaker from a growth area in western Oakland County, offered the full House an amendment to send the shared taxes to school districts with the poorest people — not necessarily those with the lowest per-pupil tax bases. Dobb's amendment was set aside as the House turned to other measures.

The stated purpose of tax base sharing is to reduce the spending gap between the richest districts (\$8,000 per pupil) and the poorest (\$2,500).

THE PAIR of bills that probably

will be passed today has several differences from a Senate-passed tax sharing plan tacked onto a school aid bill a week ago. Among them:

- The Senate plan offers a carrot to wealthier districts — restoration of the \$72 million in state aid they used to get for "categorical" needs such as half of Social Security and special education. The House plan offers just partial restoration of that "recaptured" money — \$1 in categorical for every \$2 in business taxes lost.
- The Senate plan would take half the business tax growth from

every district. The House plan would take only from out-of-formula school districts (the wealthiest 30 percent), allowing poorer districts to keep all their business tax growth.

- The Senate plan would spread the business tax growth on a per-pupil basis to all districts. The House plan allocates the new money only to the in-formula districts.

KEITH, CHAIRMAN of the House Education Committee, canceled a scheduled meeting Tuesday on a proposed constitutional amendment to require "equal opportunity" for education.

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## New head trims mental health aims

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live community treatment (ACT), clubhouse, jail services and short-term crisis intervention.

HIS APRIL PROPOSAL for respite care, a service to provide temporary relief for primary caregivers of mentally ill patients, was "conceptually approved" by the County Board of Commissioners. "But we have to go another step and get the funding for it."

Cooper said ACT translates into teams of professionals who are tailored to the specific needs of 50 to 55 patients, rather than the current system of one caseworker solely responsible for 30 to 40 clients.

Proven successful elsewhere, ACT helps in "reducing and preventing hospitalization — it brings help to the individual before things get out of hand," said Cooper.

The clubhouse concept is a monitored living and working arrangement that provides "transitional employment" for mentally ill patients. "They live in the facility as a group and determine what they want to do vocationally. The purpose is to develop the self-confidence to go back to their former jobs," said Cooper.

"They're in remission or on medication — they can work but they're not ready to go back to their chosen professions. The important thing is that they're made to feel welcomed, needed and recognized."

The program differs from group living arrangements for the developmentally disabled, which are designed to teach skills for initial employment.

COOPER DOESN'T want to wait until bureaucratic transfers provide authority or funding for better-run services. "I want the money up front to start setting up the new programs and I'll use the savings to pay the state back," referring to the trade-off dollars expected from the county management of Clinton Valley's 400 beds.

Prior to his work in Oakland County, he was acting director of Clinton-Eaton-Ingham Community Mental Health, where he started the first state group home for the severely mentally retarded, and developed the world's first public screening center for Fragile X syndrome.

In accepting this job, following last summer's resignation of Dr. James Graves, Cooper said he thought he had the leadership skills to "pull all these systems together. I'm a fairly good administrator — and I think it was the challenge."

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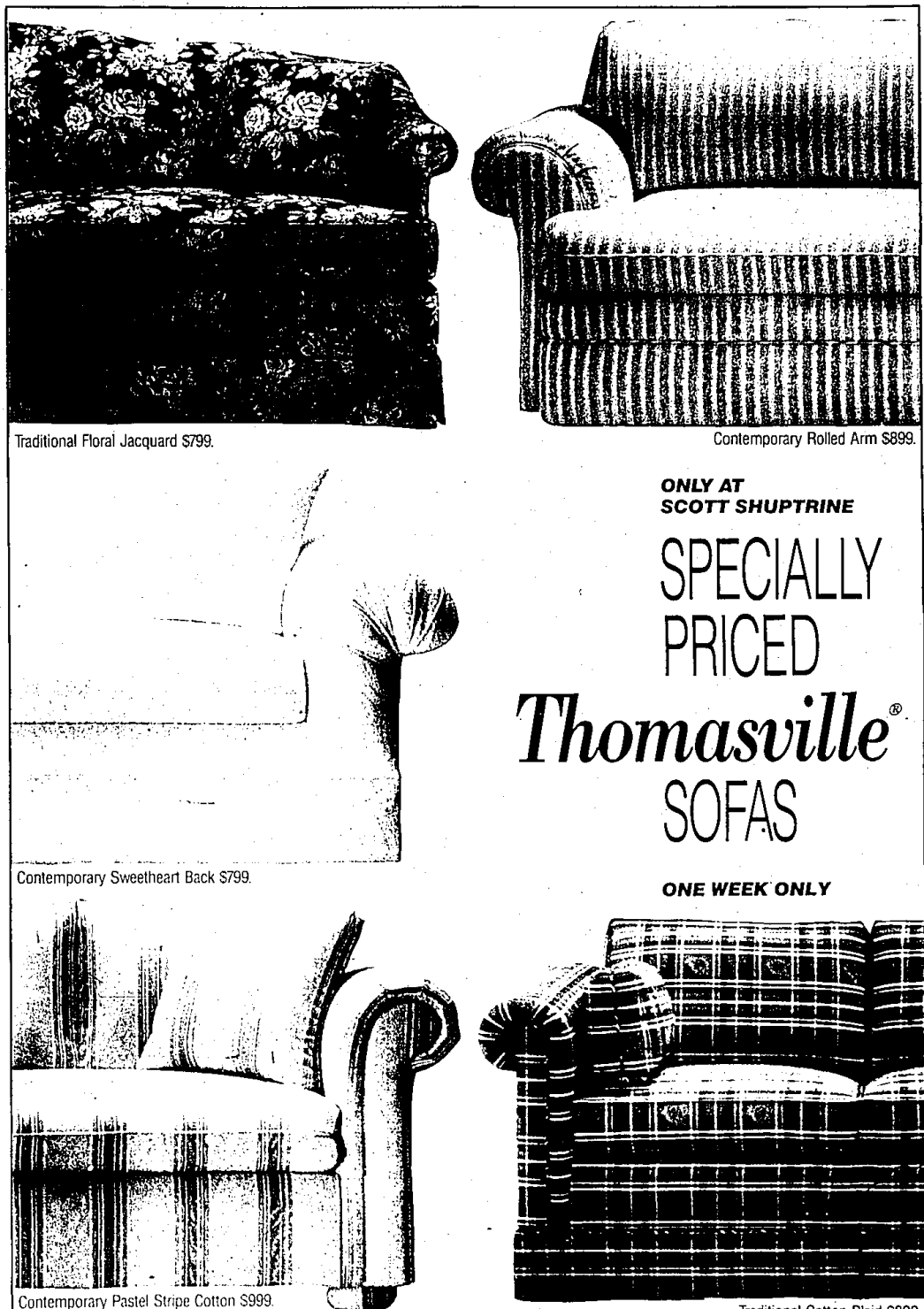
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