

# Engler agenda:

## Tax cuts, better schools, no gas tax hike

By Tim Richard  
staff writer



**'It's time to stop making lawyers wealthy and start making people healthy.'**

—Gov. John Engler

"Change," Gov. John Engler said 23 times in his 1992 state-of-the-state address.

More tax cuts, improved schools and better delivery of social services will be the themes of his second year as chief executive.

The conservative Republican insisted Tuesday there would be "no retreat down the path of failure — liberal, big government, tax and spend approach — \$150 billion worth during the 1980s."

Engler disappointed many on both sides of the aisle with his refusal to support a fuel tax increase for roads. "Now is not the time," he said, pledging Michigan would come up with a 20 percent match for an anticipated \$3 billion in federal aid without a tax hike.

How? "We have ways. There are things we can do," said Patrick Nowak, the former Oakland County politician who heads the Department of Transportation.

**DEMOCRATS, WHO control the House, sat in key silence 18 of the 22 times** Republicans interrupted his speech with applause.

Democrats joined when Engler praised American cars and auto workers, said he would work to keep open the General Motors plant at Willow Run, introduced former hostage Alann Steen and praised Lt. Gov. Connie Blinesford's commission to improve adoption laws.

"We all share that. I worked there (at Willow Run) as a kid, when it was a bomber plant," said Sen. George Z. Hart, D-Deerborn.

"The governor and I are walking hand in hand on Willow Run. First time," said Rep. Kirk Profit, D-Ypsilanti, whose district include the auto plant. Profit handed out red teddy bear badges saying "I love Willow Run."

Despite his historical emphasis, Engler offered no specific plan for persuading GM to consolidate operations there rather than in Texas.

**MORE TAX cuts are on Engler's general agenda:**

- Voter approval of his "cut and cap" plan to slice all property taxes

30 percent and hold assessment increases to 3 percent annually. The plan is likely to be on the 1992 ballot.

• A \$1,000 tax credit for every business that hires a person unemployed for six months. Engler gave no revenue loss estimate.

• "An increase in the number of smaller enterprises eligible for relief under the single business tax."

• "Additional tax incentives to revitalize Detroit and other urban centers" through enterprise zones.

**UNLIKE GOVS.** William Milliken (1969-82) and James Blanchard

(1983-90), Engler did not issue a lengthy pamphlet with dozens of detailed recommendations and extract 30 minutes' worth for a speech.

His total message was the eight-page speech, printed on recycled paper and paid for by his officeholder expense fund. The spartan appearance underscored his theme of attracting business investment by slashing state spending except for schools and social services for families.

Engler proposed two methods to improve delivery of social services:

- Expansion of "Families First" — an intensive, in-home service (to reduce the need for foster care by successfully keeping at-risk families together).

• Pilot projects called "Communities First" to integrate delivery of social services into the schools.

Republican women lawmakers warmly praised those ideas, which stemmed from their task forces. Said Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia:

"It's going to bring family services into the schools. It'll be successful. People will not suspect his motives and think he has a hidden agenda that's anti-family," she said, alluding to Blanchard's "school based clinics."

The Republican side of the aisle roared approval when Engler blasted the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association, a plaintiffs' group that gives 96 percent of its contributions to Democrats. Said Engler: "It's time to stop making lawyers wealthy and start making people healthy."

# Fuel tax stand hits area roads

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

"Argh!" That was the reaction of Road Commission for Oakland County spokesman John Joy to Gov. Engler's State of the State speech opposition to raising gas taxes for roads.

"It's really unfortunate because the gas tax money is the money which is used for the daily maintenance of roads," Joy said. "We have 425 more miles of road in Oakland County than in 1984 when the last gas tax hike was implemented. Yet we have the same number of employees and trucks. All our trucks are 10-15 years old."

"This past storm proves how hard it is to get things done." All the hype about federal funds isn't going to help Oakland County, Joy maintains since to qualify you must come up with matching funds and "there is no money here for matches."

The federal funds will go to the Michigan Department of Transportation to build new roads we can't maintain, he claims.

Legislation such as Rep. John Bennett, D-Redford, raised an eyebrow at Engler's opposition to a fuel tax increase. "How are we gonna improve roads?" he asked.

Said Rep. Dennis Hertel, D-Detroit, chairman of the House Transportation Committee: "Without additional revenue, (road building) is going to be jeopardized."

Two outstate Republicans also were unhappy at Engler's opposition to a fuel tax increase.

"I'm disappointed. We've got a lot of work to do," said Rep. Susan Muscell of Howell.

"A modest gas tax is justified. I'm disappointed," said Rep. Robert Bender, R-Middleville.

**BUT OTHERS** on both sides of the aisle wanted no part of any tax increase.

"He's not allowing himself to waver," said freshman Rep. John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Township. "His position on the fuel tax goes in

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