

Quiet revolt

Senators reduce school bill damage

By TIM RICHARDS
STAFF WRITER

In a quiet revolt, suburban state senators Wednesday upset Sen. Dan DeGros's applicants, reducing the damage his school aid bill will do to out-of-formula districts.

"I prepared a large pink sign labeled 'job termination,' signifying pink slips," said Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, spreading his arms about five feet apart. "But I didn't have to use it on the Senate floor. It's still in my office."

The revolt against DeGros, R-Port Huron, chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on school aid, occurred in the Republican caucus and behind the scenes.

Instead of taking away \$107 million in state, out-of-formula and Social Security, DeGros's bill took back \$72 million, the same as last year. The amendment occurred during general orders when roll call isn't recorded.

Out-of-formula districts are typically suburban areas with healthy business tax bases. They get no general state aid but draw "categorical" aid for retirement, special edu-

cation and state-mandated programs. "I'm not happy," said Bouchard despite his small victory. "But when I have the option of losing two legs and an arm, I'll fight to keep the arm."

Tax base sharing is still intact, said Bouchard, referring to the provision in the 1991 bill requiring out-of-formula districts to share half the growth in their business property taxes with the rest of the state.

"But I have an agreement we'll seek an expedited ruling from the Supreme Court on both tax base sharing and recapture," he said in an interview outside the Senate chamber. Tax base sharing has been halted by circuit court order, though affected schools still must put the money in an escrow account.

"It had us between a rock and a hard spot," said Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, whose schools would have been the most heavily affected in the state.

"I hesitatingly voted for it (the final bill) because it was substantially better than when it came from committee," Faxon said. "It still

contains egregious errors. Nor have we removed the possibility they could reappear in the House."

The \$3.1 billion school aid bill goes to the House, where the DeGros version has a champion in Rep. James O'Neill Jr., D-Saginaw, chair of the House school aid subcommittee. O'Neill, like DeGros, wants to dole out as much categorical aid as possible from out-of-formula districts — mainly in Oakland, western Wayne and Macomb counties — to help poorer districts.

The amended version won 24-12 Senate approval. Voting yes: Republicans, Mat Dumas of Lake Orion, Robert Goke of Northville and David Housman of West Bloomfield, and Democrats Faxon and George Hart of Dearborn.

Voting no: Bouchard and Democrat William Frost of Westland. "It was the first major defeat for DeGros, O'Neill and their allies, a bipartisan group from farm areas and older cities whose stated goal is to reduce the funding disparity of \$2,500 to \$8,000 between the poorest and richest districts."

Bouchard circulated memos to his 37 colleagues detailing their schools' loss of revenue if DeGros's "equity correction" bill had passed.

Area districts:

- Avondale \$800,000.
- Birmingham \$5.2 million.
- Bloomfield Hills \$4.4 million.
- Clarendonville \$265,000.
- Farmington \$5.5 million.
- Rochester \$2.8 million.
- West Bloomfield \$2.1 million.
- Livonia \$4.6 million.
- Plymouth-Canton \$1.6 million.
- Southfield \$565,000.

In contrast, all the schools in DeGros's Thumb area would have lost only a combined \$1.7 million.

In other amendments, the Senate stripped from the aid bill:

- \$13 million for "schools of choice" transportation, rejecting Gov. John Engler's recommendation. "Let the money go into the formula, and let the school districts decide how to spend it," said Faxon, voting no.
- \$6.3 million for a dozen districts to operate 200 class days a year instead of the required 180. "What's to say the 20 faddled days will yield results?" said Faxon.

Reserve county park campsites by June 1

Campers can get a head start on summer with advance campsite reservations at Addison Oaks County Park.

The all-new program at Addison Oaks allows visitors to reserve a primitive or modern campsite through Labor Day. All summer reservations must be made by Monday, June 1.

"Campers can reserve a site for a minimum of two nights, but no more than 14 nights at a time. This program offers the convenience of securing a campsite early," Rob Coffey, park supervisor, said.

Participants can make reservations by mail or in person, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The \$4 reservation fee is payable by cash, check or VISA.

Friday and Saturday night dates must be reserved as a unit. No reservations for holiday weekends are accepted. Weekend camping starts at Addison Oaks on Friday, April

24 and at Groveland on Friday, May 1. The seven-day regular camping season begins Friday, May 15 at both parks.

Additionally, both Addison Oaks and Groveland Oaks will offer a special \$2 off discount on single night camping fees, boat rental or all-day water-slide use. (Water slide is only at Groveland Oaks).

The discount is valid only with a coupon from the Oakland County Parks. Coupons are available at both parks. The offer is good through Monday, Sept. 7.

For more information, call Addison Oaks at 630-2432 or Groveland Oaks at 634-9511.

Addison Oaks County Park is on West Homed Road, nine miles north of Rochester, near Oxford. Groveland Oaks County Park is on Dixie Highway, north of Granger Hall Road, near Holly.

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