

AAA insurance plan looks like it'll be on ballot

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

It's beginning to look as if voters will see AAA Michigan's "Lower Rates Now" plan on the Nov. 3 ballot.

Under a state Supreme Court order, the state Board of Canvassers today was scheduled to certify there are enough petition signatures.

The Legislature will have 40 calendar days to act on the auto insur-

er's 20 percent rate cut plan. But if the last six years are any indication, House Democrats will block the measure, forcing it onto the ballot.

"But a lot of legal issues were referred to the Court of Appeals," said AAA spokesman Tom Freil. "That is a stumbling block."

"Obviously we are very pleased that the public can vote on this issue. It would be tragic if 600,000 people were disenfranchised."

The second highest court must hear Democrats' claims that AAA's plan won't do what the insurer says it will — cut premiums.

Party-line vote

Democrats on the Board of Canvassers, on a 2-1 party-line vote July 23, rejected the initiative petition.

Said Democratic board member

Michael Payne: "I think people signed a petition thinking they were going to get a rollback. I don't think that's going to happen. I think just the contrary is going to happen."

One Republican member, James Alexander of Birmingham, abstained because his law firm does work for AAA.

AAA asked the Supreme Court to order the Board of Canvassers to place it on the ballot without debat-

ing the proposal's merits. The high court's brief order, issued Thursday, said:

"There being no dispute that sufficient valid signatures were filed, we direct the Board of State Canvassers to certify the sufficiency of the petition by 12 noon on Monday, Aug. 3."

Following the certification, the Secretary of State shall forthwith submit the petition to the Legislature.

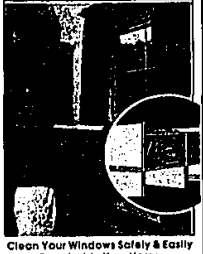
"We remand this case to the Court of Appeals, which shall set an expedited schedule for consideration of the plaintiff's (AAA) claim that the Board of State Canvassers lacks the authority to consider is-

suues other than whether there are sufficient valid signatures to qualify the proposal for certification, and the intervening defendants' claims that the proposal is invalid because of defects other than the signature requirements."

Intervening defendants include trial lawyers, whose ability to file suits would be diminished by the AAA proposal; the Michigan Citizens Lobby and consumer groups.

The Board of Canvassers' decision put state officials in a tough spot. An assistant attorney general, Gary Gordon, said he believed board members had no authority to address the merits of the proposal.

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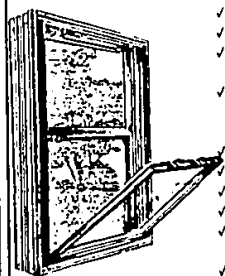
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