

# Venus shines in Feb.

# Issue: Union members on elected boards

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

A state Senate committee is taking a hard look at union bargaining who serve on the governing boards they bargain with. Sen. David Honigman's Local Government Committee Tuesday approved a bill to prohibit a Macon County commissioner from representing the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in negotiations.

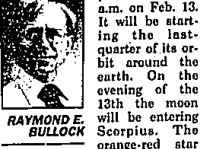
"We got an attorney general's opinion that said there was no conflict, and that we needed a law," said the bill's sponsor, Sen. Gil DiNello, D-Clinton Township. DiNello's SB 105 was sent to the Senate floor on a 4-1 vote. Supporting him were Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, Jon Clisky, R-Saginaw; and George Z. Hart, D-DeARBorn. Opposed was Jim Berryman, D-Adrian. But before the vote, senators

decided the problem was broader than DiNello's bill encompassed. Items: ■ A teachers' union president in Bloomfield Hills serving on the board in Walled Lake — cited by Honigman. ■ A police union's attorney serving on the Dearborn school board, which was having a problem with the police department — cited by Hart. ■ A police officer serving on a township board which oversees

the police chief and determines the police budget — cited by Clisky. "It's like the fox guarding the henhouse," said Clisky. As the most horrible example, Honigman cited Texas, where legislators also are paid lobbyists. DiNello's bill couldn't be amended to cover the other cases because a separate bill is needed to amend those governing laws. The Senate passed the same bill

in the last session, but it died in the House. Honigman said DiNello's bill applied only to a board member serving as a union negotiator, not to a rank and file union member. In other business, the Labor Committee took no action on three bills by DiNello to allow large townships to have jurisdiction over county roads.

## SKY WATCH



RAYMOND E. BULLOCK  
Scorpius. The

orange-red star in the south, 15 degrees to the left of the moon, is Antares (an Taurus), the scorpion's "heart."

Watch the moon pass Antares; on the morning of the 14th it will be three degrees above Antares (in the south southeast), and on the 15th it will be 12 degrees to the left of that star.

Mars, which has been drifting westward through the stars of Gemini, ends its retrograde (backward) motion on the 15th and resumes direct (eastward) motion. The planet hasn't really been going backward; this is an optical illusion, caused as the faster moving earth passes between the slower moving planet and the sun. Mars will be found a little more to the east (left) in Gemini from night to night.

Look toward the west southwest around 7 p.m. on the 18th and try to spot Mercury. That planet will be 25 degrees below Venus, just to the left of due west. During the rest of the month Mercury will be displayed at its best for evening viewing this year. Mercury will be at its maximum elongation (greatest apparent distance from the sun) in three days.

Venus, which attains maximum brightness during the last half of February, is the third brightest object in the sky (only the sun and moon are brighter), and reportedly can produce shadows. If you plan to look for your shadow in "Venus-light," you have to be out in the countryside, far away from the bright lights of civilization (not to mention the light of the sun and moon).

Wintertime is an especially good time to try because of the contrast between a dark shadow and the white, snow-covered ground. Several evenings both before and after the 18th are favorable because there will be no moon in the sky.

New Moon will occur at 8:05 a.m. on Feb. 21. The moon will be located between the earth and the sun and will not be visible. The moon and Venus will have a beautiful pairing in just three evenings.

Also on the 21st, Mercury is at maximum elongation. It will be 18 degrees to the east (left) of the sun and will be nine degrees above the western horizon around 7 p.m. It will help to use binoculars to scan the sky for Mercury, and an unobstructed horizon line is essential.

For additional help in finding Mercury, wait until the evening of the 22nd. The waxing crescent moon will be three degrees below and to the right of Mercury. Once you find the moon, use binoculars to scan above and to the left to spot Mercury. On the evening of the 23rd the moon will be eight degrees (full moon diameter) directly above Mercury.

Venus will form a spectacular display with the moon on the evening of the 24th. The planet will be two degrees directly above the "smiling" crescent moon. If you notice the unlighted portion of the moon "glowing" softly, you might think that light scattered by Venus is responsible. In fact, it's sunlight reflecting off the earth ("earthshine") that produces the effect.

The moon returns to Taurus on the last day of the month. Once again it will be located between the Pleiades and Aldebaran, within three degrees of its position on Feb. 1.

An excellent aid for learning constellations and keeping up to date with the sky is the monthly "Sky Calendar." A one-year subscription is \$6 and is available from the Abrams Planetarium, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 48824.

Raymond Bullock is the former coordinator of the planetarium and observatory at the Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills. He now works at a Troy-based firm that specializes in laser displays and effects.

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