

Engler urges suburban schools to cut labor costs

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Suburban school districts should stop giving double-digit pay increases and learn to control costs, says Gov. John Engler.

The first-term governor is under fire — especially in suburban districts — for pushing a bill to cut school property taxes 20 percent with no mechanism in place for state reimbursement. Engler's plan was bitterly assailed in the Senate Taxation Committee by suburban superintendents, some of whom fear losing a quarter of their budgets.

High-price education isn't necessarily better education, Engler said. He doesn't accept the notion that southeastern Michigan's price level has to be higher than the rest of the state's.

Here is the text of this newspaper's exclusive interview.

Q. Your name is being taken in vain among a lot of out-of-formula school districts and school boards, Republican-vot-

ing areas like Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham and Livonia, on your proposed 20 percent property tax cut. They're up in arms. If you were a school board member in an out-of-formula district facing a 20 percent cut in revenue, what would you do?

Engler: "I would stop giving double-digit pay increases over a period of two or three years."

"And I would, in some cases, look at the state (average) millage, which is now 36 mills, and conclude that if my mills were at 24, as one of those districts mentioned is (Bloomfield Hills), it might be fair to go back to the mills."

Q. That defeats the purpose of cutting the property tax (to lower costs and make the state economically competitive).

Engler: "It achieves one important purpose. It lets the voters, the taxpayers, make the decision rather than the tax assessor.

"Today the critical friend of the school budget is the assessor, and often the most irrelevant person is the taxpayer. We'd like to reverse those priorities."

"Also a question that needs to be looked at is how much money — what ultimately would be the per-student expenditure when some schools' cost per student is approaching what it would cost in the finest private schools? Are we getting close to the point — is \$8,000 enough? Will \$10,000 per student —

"We know that when we assess performance, there's no correlation between what we spend per student and the result in the classroom."

Q. Their argument would be that in southeast Michigan you have a cost structure that's 22 percent higher than the rest of the state. Construction is that much higher. Hospitalization costs are 18-percent higher. (Teacher) salaries are 22 percent higher. The whole cost

structure is higher than the rest of the state.

Engler: "That is an excuse, not an answer. And it certainly isn't an explanation."

"They've negotiated the contracts that they're now having difficulty affording. They may well have to go back and review their practices. Many of them administratively are two and three times the cost of comparably-sized schools. That all has to be examined."

"Every business in one of these school districts paying taxes has had to re-examine practices with an eye toward managing money better. Virtually every homeowner has had to examine the family budget with an eye toward managing the money."

"Michigan education has been protected in the budgets I have proposed. As a result we have moved up dramatically in national ranking in education, but we never reach adequacy, to hear some schools talk."

"I support quality education,

and I support the maximum accountability for our schools. That's one of the reasons I announced there will be a governor's report card on all schools in the state — so that every parent, regardless of where he or she lives, can compare their own school to any other school and judge for themselves the results and measure the return on investment."

Q. A group of 14 state representatives from both parties is pushing a reform plan to get schools off the property tax — reduce it by half — and shift to an income tax, with allowance for the voters to replace the income tax later with a sales tax increase. What's your feeling about that movement?

Engler: "First of all, there has to be a choice made. Is it to eliminate the property tax and replace it with an income tax, or to replace the property tax with the sales tax? I mean, I don't see one as being an intermediary step along the road to the other."



Gov. John Engler

They'll have to make a choice.

"My position is that we ought to lock in some minimum guarantees of property tax relief, given the fact that assessments are rising at more than 10 percent for more than half the people of the state."

FINISH MY BACHELOR'S DEGREE!

IT'S A NEW YEAR. IT'S TIME TO COMPLETE MY BACHELOR'S DEGREE. I'LL ATTEND CLASS ONE NIGHT A WEEK IN A PROGRAM THAT'S CONVENIENT FOR ME, A WORKING ADULT, AND IT HAS PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO MY WORK. CLASSES BEGIN SOON! I'LL APPLY TODAY!



INFORMATION SESSIONS:

On Farmington Hills Campus
(West 12 Mile Road
between Drake & Halstead)
6 pm Monday, February 22
6 pm Monday, March 8

Adults can complete a bachelor's degree in 18 months
Attend class only one night per week
Classes are designed to improve leadership and communication skills
Convert life experience and prior learning into college credit
Instruction features group projects and discussions
Meet in the same small group throughout the program.

Accelerated Degree Programs
William Tyndale College
35700 West Twelve Mile Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3147
Call: (313) 553-7200



Stewart-Glen Furniture's Pennsylvania House WINTER SALE

ENDS FEBRUARY 22

DON'T BE LEFT OUT IN THE COLD!



Save at least 35% on every piece of Pennsylvania House, Conover and Harden.
Save at least 25% on all other fine lines.

Stewart-Glen

2600 N. Woodward Ave.
Just South of Square Lake Rd.
Fine Furniture Since 1917

of Bloomfield Hills

332-8348
Open Mon., Thurs., Fri. 'til 9 p.m.
Tues., Wed., Sat. 'til 5:30 p.m.

Look your best. See your best.
Save 30% on our best designer frames.



Designers such as Gloria Vanderbilt, Monet, Evan Picone, Liz Claiborne and others had a hand in these. And you get 30% savings on your frames when purchased with prescription lenses. Frames, reg. \$89 to \$300, sale \$62.30 to \$210. No other discounts or insurance benefits apply. We are a H.I.P. provider. Optical, all metro Detroit stores, also Genesee Valley. Sale ends February 27.

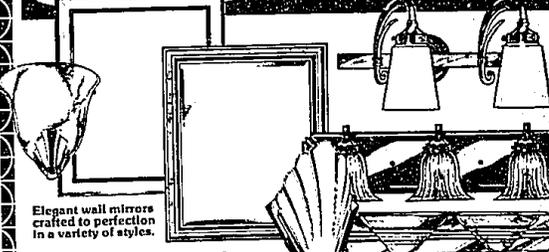
Northland 569-3277 Fashion 334-8704 Eastland 372-9199 Lakeside 247-0340
Westland 525-7052 Twyla Oaks 348-3631 Oakland 589-1379 Summit Place 681-0243
Southland 287-4676 Genesee Valley 732-3310

HUDSON'S
OPTICAL

Bathroom Mirror & Light

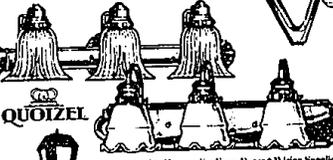
sale

Open up your interiors with elegant wall mirrors and lighting fixtures from Quoizel. Come in today and select the one that's just right for your decor while they're on sale at BROSE.



Elegant wall mirrors crafted to perfection in a variety of styles.

10% OFF Our 40%-50% Already Discounted Prices
SALE LASTS 10 DAYS ONLY!



Lighting Fixtures for Every Decor • All Wiring, Supplies and Light Bulbs

BROSE ELECTRICAL CONSTRUCTION, INC.
37400 W. 7 MILE ROAD
LIVONIA, MI 48152 • (313) 464-2211

MON., TUES., WED., SAT. 9:30-6:00
THURS., FRI. 9:30-9:00